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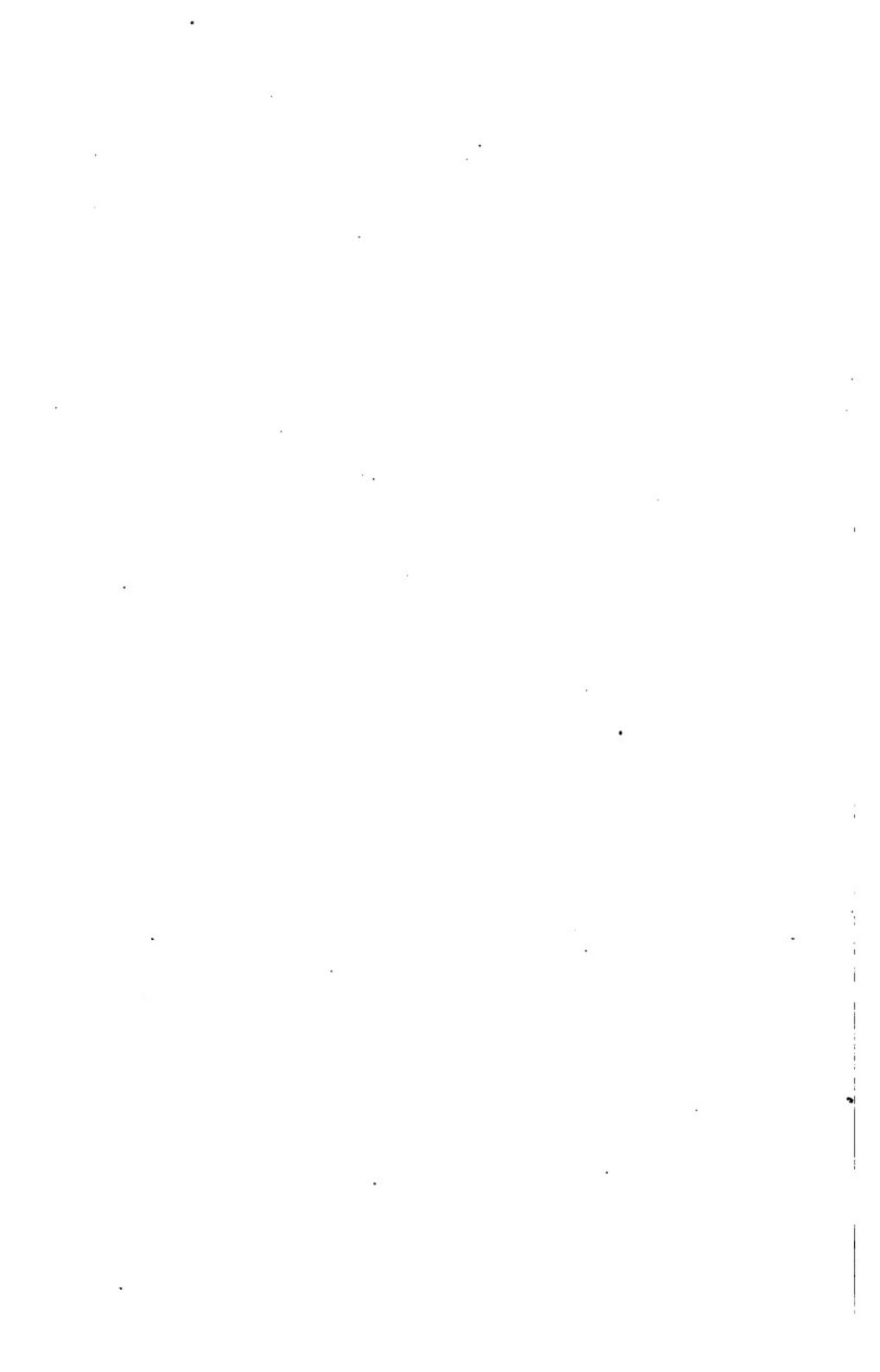
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THE CHASE

A TALE OF THE SOUTHERN STATES

From the French of Jules Lermine

BY

ADELINE SERGEANT

*ONLY TRANSLATION SANCTIONED BY THE AUTHOR AND BY THE
INTERNATIONAL LITERARY ASSOCIATION*

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T H E C H A S E.

P R O L O G U E.

I.

THE THUNDERBOLT.

A FINE autumn evening ; purple clouds still glowing on the horizon ; the warm air heavy with fragrance ; the dark foliage of the Bois de Boulogne softly shadowed forth in outline against a clear sky ; the measured fall of horses' hoofs advancing at a foot-pace towards the city : so much for the picturesque aspect of the scene.

A few words were now and then softly interchanged between two of the riders, one of whom was a lively, handsome young man ; the other, a girl, whose long fair hair fell over her graceful shoulders and slender figure like a mantle.

“ Dear Alice ! how happy I am ! If you knew how much I love you ! ”

“ Do you think that you will always care for me ? ”

"Always; I swear it."

So much for the sentimental side of the picture.

Finally, at some distance behind the two lovers, could be seen a fantastic and pretentious-looking individual of foppish appearance, equipped from head to foot in the height of fashion, to a degree which can be imagined rather than described: a young exquisite whose sole occupation was to fidget in his saddle and suck the handle of his riding-whip.

So much for the absurd side of it.

Let us introduce our characters more in detail, and satisfy the natural curiosity of our readers by beginning with Alice Lodier. She was twenty years of age: a fair and lovely girl, with dark-grey eyes. The child of creole parents, she had been orphaned since her infancy, together with her brother, the young man who took the third place in the opening list of our *dramatis personæ*. She had been educated by her maternal aunt, Madame Longpré, a woman of the most rigid principles and of iron will,—so, at least, she used to say,—characteristics which did not prevent her from yielding a profound submission to all Alice's caprices.

They were very innocent caprices, however. Alice was one of the purest and sweetest of girls, although she possessed a somewhat mutinous disposition which did not love restraint. In spite of her delicate appearance, she was strong and energetic. She loved fresh air and liberty; her greatest delights were to gallop in the face of a high wind, to swim against the stream, to draw in great breaths of air and life. Her moral was

like her physical nature. She reached out enthusiastically after all that was noble and true—after justice, devotion, and earnest striving for the right.

Good Madame Longpré often called her Donna Quixote. And indeed there was no class of evil-doers or misbelievers with whom she was not ready to break a lance. Add to these qualities an inexhaustible fund of sympathy with the weak and kindness for the suffering; and even the most sceptical of readers will admit that Alice was worthy of the admiring epithets which we have—only too sparingly—bestowed upon her.

One day in Alice's life a new prospect suddenly opened out before her. Young men of high rank and good breeding had often already fluttered round the heiress, who, they knew, would have many thousands for her marriage portion. But as yet Alice might have placed her hand upon her heart and answered in the historic words—

“It beats no faster than usual!”

When suddenly a warning throb surprised and half dismayed her.

Six months had passed since this phenomenon was first produced. One fine evening, a servant at the door of Madame Longpré's drawing-room had announced M. Charles Valville, and a young man of high stature and dark complexion, with frank, clear eyes and smiling mouth, had bowed to the old lady and said—

“Madame, my father, M. Valville, of New Orleans,

made me venture to hope that for his sake you would kindly receive his son."

And while the worthy aunt, with the assistance of her spectacles, deciphered the foreign handwriting, and then cried out that M. Valville had been an old friend of M. Lodier's, and that she was delighted to receive his son, Alice's heart throbbed faster still—so fast and so loud that Charles must surely have heard it beat, for he glanced at the girl and blushed like a child, while she only turned a little pale.

Her brother was also present, and, with the tact that characterised him, lisped out—

"What a funny idea! He's from America!"

Charles looked at the young exquisite, with his tiny coat, and hair fresh from the curling-irons, and repressed a smile as he assured himself by unmistakable points of resemblance that this little product of civilisation was really the young lady's brother.

Eusèbe Lodier had not a bad disposition; he was not even without intelligence; but he was utterly given over to foppery, affectation, and love of fashion. He was constantly to be seen in the green-rooms of the theatres of the Variétés, or of the Palais Royal; and thought it the height of wit to imitate the dress and manners of his favourite actors, Lassouche and Priston; above all, the height of good taste to turn everything into ridicule.

To Eusèbe, patriotism, love, devotion, passion of what kind soever—political, artistic, or scientific—was nothing but mere 'stuff and nonsense.' He was well versed in slang, and used it not a little. Certainly it would have

been useless to talk sentiment to him. He repeated continually that he was a practical man, a man of the world and not behind the times—not he!

It was Eusèbe who followed in the wake of Alice and Charles as they re-entered Paris after a long ride by way of the Champs Elysées, passing slowly along the avenue in the light of the setting sun.

The two young people loved each other, and seemed never weary of telling each other of their love. Their engagement had been sanctioned by Madame Longpré, who, in spite of her iron will, made not the slightest opposition to the proposed union of the young couple.

As for Eusèbe, on his way to the woods with Alice and Charles he had begun to say that they were becoming quite wearisome with their billing and cooing, and that they touched the light guitar rather too frequently. He consoled himself by humming comic songs beneath his breath. It was his sole revenge. He did condescend now and then to sing a comic song.

"What are you going to do this evening?" Alice was asking of her lover.

"Oh, I am going to pay my respects to Madame Longpré."

"I should hope so," said Alice, smiling. "But I meant to say, where are you dining, and with whom?"

"I will give you a faithful account of myself, my dear wife," replied Valville gaily. "One of my friends from New Orleans, Doctor Freedy, a Franco-American, came to France about a fortnight ago. At first he only passed through Paris, as he was obliged to go south immediately.

But this morning he telegraphed to me that he was on his way back, and that we would dine together this evening at the *Maison d'Or*."

"Doctor Freedy—was it not he who . . ."

"Who saved my life? Yes, indeed! One day when I was walking on the banks of the Mississippi I slipped and fell in. Certainly the Father of Waters meant to hold fast his prey . . ."

"When Doctor Freedy threw himself into the current upon some logs of wood . . ."

"And drew me out of the water—restored a citizen to his country."

"I love him already!"

"And so do I, for without him I should never have known you, Alice."

"Hush, flatterer! Then you are going to dine with him?"

"And, if you will allow me, with the fair Eusèbe."

Hearing his own name, the brother approached them.

"Oh, you have come down from the clouds, have you?" he said. "Got down to earth at last? Well, take care you don't hurt yourselves."

Charles slightly shrugged his shoulders, and said with some abruptness—

"Will you dine with me and one of my friends tonight at the *Maison d'Or*?"

"Wherever you please; I don't mind."

"Thanks."

Then leaning towards Alice, he added in a lower tone:

"Dr. Freedy must have seen my father and my sisters

before he left home. Perhaps my letter had already reached them, and he has brought me good news!"

"I shall be so glad if your sisters like me already, without knowing me, as I like them."

"A liking which they deserve. Lucile and Jeanne are worthy of you; and if I were not afraid of repeating such a worn-out bit of commonplace, I should say that my sisters were two angels. And when you are my wife, Alice, you will come with me to ask for my father's blessing, will you not?"

"Have I not promised? Do you doubt my word?"

Let us discreetly refrain from listening to their parting words, uttered as they reached a small house in the Avenue d'Antin, when Alice gave her lover's hand a last pressure, and bestowed upon him one of those beautiful smiles which were as tender and as well worthy of remembrance as a kiss of love.

"I will leave my horse at the stable," said Eusèbe to Charles, "and shall see you at your place presently, shall I not?"

"As you please, my dear fellow," said Charles.

Glad of these few moments of solitude, the young American bent his steps towards the Rue de Miroménil, where he occupied a bachelor's suite of rooms, which he had furnished with the fastidious taste of an artist and a traveller.

His groom took his horse to the stables, and Charles, after completing a hasty toilet, threw himself into an arm-chair to dream a while of his present happiness and of his hopes for the future.

Charles had lost his mother at an early age, but his father had proved a loving and devoted protector to his three children. He was one of the richest planters in Louisiana, a just and honest man, who had been amongst the first to proclaim the emancipation of the slaves, a circumstance which had procured for him the enmity of the Southerners, whose efforts he had refused to aid during the so-called war of secession. He possessed a considerable fortune, but he maintained as a principle that men should be valued only by what they know and by what they do. Charles received, therefore, a remarkably good education ; and, as he possessed good abilities, he profited by his opportunities. His father then sent him to Europe in order that he might be thoroughly inoculated with that social and moral culture, which, he believed, the Latin races have done more than any other to initiate and to propagate.

Of French origin, M. Valville still nourished a profound affection for his fatherland ; and upon the death of his wife he nearly quitted America for ever. But the care of his own interests forbade him to put this resolution into practice. It was, however, with sincere delight that he received from his son the lengthy letters which told him once again of France, of her brave struggles and her reconquered greatness.

His two daughters, Lucile, who was older than Charles, and Jeanne, who was younger, were at once his consolation and his pride. No family was ever more closely united, or more deserved the esteem of all who knew it.

Yet M. Valville did not hide from himself that around

him, in that same Louisiana, which was still writhing in its defeat, subjected by the United Northern States, but not subdued, and ready still, perhaps, to uplift the standard of revolt against the Union, his own belief in the equality of both races, black and white, and the bold application which he had made of the law of emancipation, had raised against him a sentiment of deep hostility which waited only for a fit occasion to declare itself. His son had begged him hundreds of times to realise his property and return to Europe, to his native country. Certain in his own mind of his father's consent to his marriage with Alice Lodier, whose father Valville had long known and loved, Charles said to himself that when they went to Louisiana they would triumph together over his lingering indecision.

So Charles rejoiced in the contemplation of a happiness that satisfied both his conscience and his heart.

"Hop! Let's be off," said Eusèbe, entering hurriedly.

Awaking from his dream, Charles took his hat and followed the young man.

"I suppose double harness will suit you," said Eusèbe, with his irritating drawl. "As for me, I won't be dragged into such a snare just yet, I can tell you."

In Valville's humour at that moment he could not but feel displeased at Eusèbe's tone, and he answered coldly—

"Listen, my good fellow. You are quite at liberty to think just what you please for yourself, but, once for all, when we are speaking of your sister, whom I love and

esteem—when we speak of my wife, in fact—I beg that you will make no more of these jokes, which may be very witty, no doubt, but which are insults to the purest and worthiest of feelings."

Eusèbe, whose assurance was more apparent than real, showed that he was a little embarrassed.

"You know," he said, "I make fun of it, but . . ."

"But you don't believe a word you say," interrupted Charles, touched by his confusion. "I do not set myself up as a judge, but since we have mentioned the subject, let me say that it is a foolish pride which plays at scepticism and want of feeling—and, besides!" he added laughing, "you will be in love yourself some day."

"As for that . . ."

"And some day you will be more enthusiastic and Quixotic than we are ourselves!"

"Come!" said Eusèbe, struggling with himself, "when you see me caught, times will have changed indeed."

Charles took his arm.

"Look here," he said in his friend's ear, "I will simply put a possible case before you: nobody can hear us, so just answer frankly. What would you do if some ruffian offered any insult to your sister?"

Eusèbe started, and for a second his whole countenance changed. But suddenly obstinacy resumed her sway, and he merely hummed the refrain of a song—

"I would draw my sword, my sword, my sword,
I would draw my father's sword."

"I understand you," said Charles. "You are a brave fellow, Eusèbe."

"Not at all; not a bit of it," cried the young man.
"I am not such an ass as to go in for high tragedy."

"Oh no: we understand; you are as hard as iron, of course. In the meantime, here we are at the Maison d'Or. Let us see if Freedy has come. And then, to dinner!"

"Not any too soon!" laughed the lad. "I am quite exhausted with listening to your sermon."

Doctor Freedy had not yet arrived. The telegram had mentioned seven as the time of meeting, and it wanted still a few minutes to that hour.

Charles entered a small drawing-room, and ordered some Madeira.

"Eusèbe," he said, as he filled the two glasses, "here's to your future exploits—the Coming Knight!"

"Ah! only give me the chance, and then you'll see!" replied that amiable young man as he tossed off his glass with a scientific jerk of the elbow, that a jockey might have envied him.

At that moment the door opened, and Dr. Freedy presented himself.

"At last!" cried Charles, as he rushed to greet him.

Edward Freedy was the perfect type of an English gentleman, according to the French idea. He was of middle height, pale and clean-shaven. He seldom laughed; he was never excited. His voice was cold and monotonous. His movements were as regular as those of an automaton. He was impassible in every sense.

Nevertheless, the story went that in India he had fought like a lion to save certain of his countrymen whose lives

were in danger by a revolt of the natives. In Ireland, it was said that he had once saved a child who had fallen into a torrent. Indeed, rumour went so far as to accuse him of having, in the space of four-and-twenty hours, encountered and killed four duelling opponents, for behaving with gross insolence to a lady in Germany.

"How glad I am to see you, Freedy!" cried Charles, who was anything but impassible himself. "Come, let us sit down and have two good hours' chat over the present, past, and future."

He noticed that Freedy's calm expressionless gaze was fixed attentively upon the little fop, who, in honour of the event, had donned a costume of the highest fashion—baggy trousers, pilot coat, with enormous sleeves, and collar open at the throat—which somehow recalled to mind the fantastic attire of a learned monkey. Charles could not quite suppress a sigh as he regarded him.

"M. Eusèbe Lodier," said he, "my future brother-in-law."

Freedy bowed. But Eusèbe held out his hand.

"Shake hands," he said. "The friends of our friends, you know, etcetera!"

Not the faintest sign of surprise could be seen in Freedy's face. They shook hands.

Dinner was served, and the repast began immediately.

"Forgive me my selfishness," said Charles, "but first of all, tell me whether you have seen my dear father and sisters."

"I was at Battle Field Plantation on the fourteenth

of September," was the answer. "I saw M. Valville. He was in excellent health, and sent his love. Miss Lucile and Miss Jeanne were as pretty as ever. Kind messages from them too."

"Nothing more?"

"Really, I think not."

"Had not my father received a letter from me?—an urgent letter about most important matters, upon which my whole future depends?"

"I do not know what you are alluding to, my dear boy," replied Freedy. "But I remember that Mr. Valville said to me, just as I was setting off, 'I will write to my son by the next post, and he will be quite satisfied with what I say.'"

"My dear, good father!" cried Charles. "And you think that that is nothing, Freedy? Why, my whole happiness depends on what you have told me!"

"I am very glad to hear it," said Freedy.

"These philosophers!" said Charles, laughing; "anything human is quite out of their way. Here's a man who feels nothing! Really, Freedy, when I look at you, I ask myself if it is indeed you who surrendered your whole fortune to save a ruined brother: if it really is you who have risked your life for your fellow-creatures twenty times or more?"

"Quite so," murmured Eusèbe. "Another fool!"

Freedy looked at him coldly, without any expression of annoyance. Then he addressed himself to Charles.

"My dear fellow," he said gently, "the organisation of the human frame is very delicate. One should not

squander its resources. You are constantly expending yourself, like a true Frenchman, in ready money, and some day you will find that you have exhausted your capital."

"A pretty metaphor . . ."

"It is the truth. Why do you excite yourself about everything? Why should you laugh at what is not amusing?" and he glanced at Eusèbe: "why should you weep over what is not sad? Smiles and tears, enthusiasm and energy, are precious gifts of which one should be sparing, and of which you emotional men are much too lavish."

"Yes, I know how philosophic you are. By the by, tell me, if you please, you who go by clockwork, why you were six minutes behind your time in coming here? yes, six minutes! High treason against all punctuality!"

"I have accused myself, it seems," said Freedy, "but I must excuse myself also. When I arrived in Paris from Marseilles, I went home to get my letters. But my servant was out and had taken the key, so that I lost six minutes in waiting for him."

"Six minutes' lost time!"

"Almost. Except for one point. I left word where I was, in order that he should bring me my letters here."

"See what it is to be a man of business!"

As he said these words, a knock was heard at the door, and a man-servant of most correct appearance presented himself.

It was Jack, Doctor Freedy's servant. In noticing the exactitude with which he copied the doctor's manner,

one might have been reminded of the proverb—"Like master, like man."

"Any letters?" Freedy asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Give them to me, and wait outside. I will see if I have any orders for you."

"Yes, sir."

His correspondence consisted of some half-dozen letters. Freedy was interested in several industrial undertakings, for which he had supplied the machinery.

"Allow me," he said to his two companions.

"Pray, do as you would at home," said Eusèbe, while Charles merely responded by a slight movement of his head.

Freedy took his knife, cut open all the envelopes and placed them beside him, one by one. Then he drew out each letter, read it, folded it up, and replaced it in its envelope before passing on to another.

He held the last in his hand.

Suddenly an almost imperceptible change came over his features. He half closed his eyes, and then began to read once more. His gaze became fixed, as though he could not comprehend the meaning of those lines, over which, nevertheless, he continued to pore most earnestly.

Charles noticed these signs of emotion, so rare in a man of his phlegmatic temperament, but he did not venture to question him on the subject.

Freedy looked at his friend, and passed his hand over his forehead.

"What can be the matter?" cried Charles at last, carried away by sudden anxiety. "Has some misfortune happened to you?"

Freedy's lips moved, but no sound issued from them. It seemed as if the strong man must be suffering indescribable agony, for beads of perspiration stood on his pale forehead.

"For Heaven's sake, Freedy, speak! You frighten me!"

"My friend," said Freedy, in a deep, hoarse voice, "this letter is from Mr. Thompson, a millowner at Algiers.* He is a trustworthy man, who would deceive no one willingly, who would never give ear to a report unless he could ascertain its truth. I must mention these facts before I tell you why he has written to me."

"How strange you look! You really alarm me!"

"Be as brave as you can. Read!"

With a quick gesture he held out to Charles the open letter.

Charles dared not look at it.

"Read it!" repeated Freedy.

Suddenly a terrible cry, a sort of convulsive sob, escaped from the young man's breast.

For this was what he read:

"Mr. Valville's plantation at Battle Field has been burnt down and plundered. Mr. Valville was murdered, and his two daughters have disappeared."

* A town on the Mississippi, exactly opposite New Orleans.

II.

THE WOMAN WITH AN IRON WILL.

WHEN Valville, true to his word, appeared at ten o'clock that evening in Madame Longpré's drawing-room, he looked so pale that Alice, seized by a presentiment of misfortune, rose abruptly and advanced to meet him with outstretched hands.

"What is the matter?" she exclaimed.

Eusèbe, in great fear of any manifestation of violent feeling, was trying to hide his embarrassment at a side-table covered with albums. Charles could not speak; but Alice saw that the tears trembled in his eyes, and were ready to fall.

Without waiting for an answer—suddenly possessed by a feeling of terror that made her dumb—she drew Charles forward to a sofa. He sank down upon it with fixed eyes and trembling lips.

Madame Longpré was lying back in an arm-chair fast asleep. Alice touched her arm and drew her attention to Valville, placing her finger on her lips at the same time.

By a mighty effort Valville spoke at last in a hoarse voice.

"A terrible misfortune! My father! my dear, good father!"

"Yes?"

"Murdered! and my two sisters gone . . . disappeared . . . carried off!"

Alice uttered a cry. In reality she did not seem able to understand what he had told her. She asked herself if she were not the victim of some dreadful nightmare. Only a few hours had passed since she had quitted Charles, happy in an avowed affection, full of confidence in the future!—and could a frightful catastrophe have fallen upon him so suddenly? No, it was impossible!

It seemed as though Valville could read the thoughts of the heart which belonged to him so entirely, for he continued with greater firmness of tone.

"I cannot doubt it; you need not doubt it yourself. It is impossible for you, in the midst of your Parisian civilisation, to understand how such crimes should be committed. You do not know what fierce hatreds still linger in our country, so lately devastated by civil war."

Then, rising to his full height, he added—

"Father, I will avenge you!—And you, dear sisters, if it be true that you have fallen into the robbers' hands,—as my grief and hate foretell—I swear to take no rest—nay, not for a single hour—until the wretches have suffered for their crimes!"

"But how can these horrible tidings have reached your ears?"

Charles replied briefly to this question. Doubt was unfortunately impossible. Scarcely had Freedy com-

municated to him the contents of his letter before Charles, in spite of the lateness of the hour, rushed off to his banker's, whither his letters were always sent. He had delayed calling there for several days, with the natural carelessness of a happy man; but now he found that there was a letter for him from his American banker, whose words confirmed the fearful intelligence.

Charles raised his head at last, and passed his nervous fingers through his black locks.

"You understand me, Alice, do you not? The reason why I am here to-night is to bid you a last farewell."

The young girl shuddered: a marble pallor overspread her countenance, and her eyes for a moment closed.

Charles continued—

"Words cannot tell you how much I suffer. Alice, you know how I loved my father. He had the noblest heart, the purest conscience that ever deserved a son's respect. When he fell beneath the blows of his murderers, I know, I feel, that one word only burst from his lips. He called me to his help! And that last cry—I hear it!—it breaks my heart. Yes, father, I am ready! I am ready!"

With arms wildly extended, and face as white as death, Valville seemed to bend before a phantom form which he alone could see.

"You are going?" said Alice faintly.

"To-morrow; as early as possible. It seems as though everything conspired against me, perhaps to punish me for my cruel negligence. No steamer leaves

Havre for five days; but the day after to-morrow one starts from Liverpool, bound for New Orleans. Although it is a longer voyage, I shall reach my destination sooner in this manner than by waiting, and in twelve days or a fortnight I shall set foot in Louisiana. Then let those who struck the blow beware! Let traitors and cowards beware!"

A long silence followed the last threatening words, words which to Alice were resonant with the brave and generous emotion of the man she loved.

She mused deeply, with her head leaning on her hand.

Suddenly she raised her face, and looked with a sweet but penetrating gaze into the young man's eyes.

"Listen to me," she said very seriously, "and answer my questions as if your father himself could hear."

He looked at her in his turn, and a quiver of anguish convulsed his features. He had loved her so much! In a few weeks they would have been united—would have set off to Louisiana together, in order to bring back with them the father whose blessing could never now be theirs! And he had not even the right—so fate decreed—to weep for his vanished happiness.

Lost in thought, Alice stood before him.

"Charles," she said in her deep, low tones, "was it from your heart and with your whole soul that you asked me to become your wife?"

"Do you doubt it, Alice? My life belongs to you."

"Well then, in my turn, I may tell you, Charles, that I accepted you as my husband of my own will, and

with all the tenderness of a loving heart, and I will prove this to you in the hour of trial."

Charles looked at her. She seemed to him like a vision of light appearing in the midst of the charnel-house into which he felt as if he had suddenly been plunged.

He seized her hand, but she drew it gently away, and, turning to her aunt, knelt down at the old lady's side.

" You have been a mother to me," she said. " You gave me your loving care when I was a child, and I have told you the inmost thoughts of my heart. Now answer me in your turn. When he whom I love is overwhelmed with bitter suffering, have I a right to abandon him ? "

Madame Longpré was fond of advancing her claim, which was innocent enough, or at least inoffensive, to the possession of an iron will which nothing in the world—no, nothing!—could subjugate. Therefore, as she had hitherto assisted merely as a passive spectator of the scene before her, she now began to realise that the time had come when she could prove " that she was not a cipher in the family," which was also one of her favourite expressions.

So, lifting her hands to her white hair—she had the kindest and gentlest long-featured old face that one can well imagine,—she cried—

" Pray, what do you mean by that, Mademoiselle? I really cannot understand ! "

This title of Mademoiselle was only employed on the great occasions when she wanted to make manifest

her iron will. Perhaps it frightened Alice, for she threw her arms round old Madame Longpré's neck, and murmured in an entreating tone—

“Aunt! my dear aunt!”

“No aunt would hear of such a thing!” exclaimed her worthy relative. “Explain what you mean! Do you imagine that I can look upon you as his wife before you are his wife? Nobody pities M. Valville for his misfortunes more than I do, but I have my own duties to fulfil, and”—here her voice rose—“I will fulfil them!”

“But, dearest aunt.”

“Do not attempt to bias me,” said Madame Longpré. “Your words, Mademoiselle Lodier”—and the use of Alice's surname denoted with the old lady the height of displeasure,—“your words are an insult to my authority.”

Alice hung her head.

“They are a complete denial of my duty to you. What! do you imagine that, much as I like and esteem M. Valville, I could allow you before your marriage to accompany him to Louisiana?”

“But, dear aunt! . . .”

“To quit your home . . .”

“I assure you . . .”

“To give to the world the revolting sight—yes, I say revolting!—of a girl casting in her lot in so unconventional a manner with that of a gentleman,—for whom, nevertheless, I have the greatest respect!”

Utterly exasperated, she sank back in her chair, her eyes ablaze with anger.

Valville thought that he ought to interfere.

"Madame," he said, "you may be sure that I shall always treasure in my heart the remembrance of your great kindness to me. Sweet as it has been to me to hear of Alice's project, I know as well as you do that it would be impossible for her to put it into execution . . ."

"Thank Heaven!" muttered Madame Longpré.

"I bow to my destiny, although my happiness is gone for ever," he continued in a broken voice. "She is . . . she has been the hope of my whole life. I must renounce it all."

"But you will come back!" cried Madame Longpré.

"Madame," said Valville sternly, "you are a European. You cannot understand our struggles and our hatreds. Certainly, since the late war, ideas of civilisation and humanity have made great progress; nevertheless, the old leaven of rebellion still remains. I hide nothing from you. I have said that I would avenge my father and my sisters. There is more than a mere personal feeling on my part—I feel that I ought to avenge the cause of civilisation, of the future, of men's outraged sense of right and wrong, which have all been attacked in us. It is a fight for life and death!"

And bowing his head, he added—

"You are right. I cannot drag her with me into the struggle. She belongs to me no longer."

"Charles!" cried Alice, "if you die, I shall die too!"

She flung herself into his arms as she spoke.

What an unpleasant position for an aunt to be in! But Madame Longpré armed herself with stoical determination, and resumed—

"I have an iron will. Where a principle is concerned, I would die in defending it, like a soldier at a post which his officer has charged him to defend!"

"It will kill me!" cried Alice.

"Courage!" murmured Charles.

"Yes, of iron!" continued Madame Longpré. "I say now—and if necessary I would say it aloud in the streets—that it is perfectly impossible for a girl to go off on a wild expedition like this, even with the best man in the world! It is wicked to have dreamt of such a thing. And it shall never be. No!" she repeated, raising her hands to heaven, "it shall never, never be!"

When Alice spoke again, it was with dignity.

"It is growing late, Charles," she said. "You must have many preparations to make for your sad voyage. It would be wrong of me to detain you longer."

She stopped short for a moment. Charles still held her in his arms, and she could feel his tears falling upon her long fair hair. Then she drew back.

"Farewell, M. Valville," she said. "Farewell! And if I die . . ."

"Alice!"

"Enough!" Madame Longpré interrupted them, in a tone which brooked no reply. "She shall never go alone to Louisiana. Her dying father's last request to me was that I would never leave her. And I never will!"

"Very well," said Alice, as she sank down upon the couch. "Then you will see me die."

"Not at all!" cried the old lady. "I tell you again,

I have a will of iron ! But no, a hundred times no ! You shall not go alone to Louisiana : it would be too unconventional, too unusual a thing to do ; besides, I should feel that I was relinquishing the trust committed to me by your parents, if I let you go."

"Then, Alice, good-bye," said Charles, withdrawing his hand from the young girl's clasp.

But Alice rose, and, with the courage born of love, advanced towards her aunt.

"Madame Longpré," she said, "you are killing him, and yet you know I love him."

"Well," said Madame Longpré, "why don't you ask me to go with you ?"

"Dear aunt ! Charles !"

Volleys of exclamations followed : innumerable kisses were pressed upon the lips of this terrible aunt with her iron will, and returned by her with wonderful complacency.

"Just so," said Eusèbe, emerging from a corner in order to quit the room unobserved. "They are leaving me behind. Not at all strange that they should, either—they don't care what becomes of me !"

END OF THE PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE BANKS OF THE MISSISSIPPI.

THE great geographer, Élisée Reclus, thus briefly describes the river Mississippi, once called the Meschacébes, or Father of Waters :—

“ The Mississippi presents perhaps the simplest type of a great river. It does not rise amidst the glaciers of a mountain-range, like the greater number of streams in Europe and Asia ; unlike the Euphrates, the Nile, or the Rhine, it waters no countries that have been made famous by wars or great historical events. It belongs to itself alone, and owes nothing either to history or legend. . . . The river is a country in itself, living, acting, and constantly changing. Upon its tide men and ideas are borne onwards ; and the deposit of sand and clay at its mouth is a symbol of the historical deposit left by successive generations of the races which have dwelt upon its banks.”

We must be allowed to add a word or two to this description. The Mississippi is at once the instrument and the obstacle of civilisation in the Southern States of America. One might call it a personification of those ancient Indian races who are always struggling against

the inroads of progress, and who, after each defeat, attempt to shake off the yoke which the conqueror has imposed upon them.

Such is the Mississippi : always conquered, yet unconquerable.

There are no scenes more beautiful or more striking than those presented by the banks of the great river in the State of Louisiana. Everywhere there is exuberant growth of foliage ; everywhere splendid luxuriance of vegetation.

But a ceaseless combat between the river and mankind has constantly to be renewed. In vain men try to turn it back, to limit its bounds. One might think that it was angry to see in its masters' hands the wealth which its fertility had given them, and which it would gladly snatch away.

But man's perseverance is equal to its tenacity, and will ultimately triumph. It has enclosed the river in a formidable belt of dikes and embankments, which extend to a length of more than fifteen hundred miles—nearly five hundred leagues,—an enormous mass of stone, fifty million cubic feet in bulk.

More than fifteen million tons of merchandise are borne on the breast of the mighty old river, which quivers with anger beneath its weight. It uproots ancient trees, and throws them up in barriers in the midst of its course. It detaches from its banks enormous masses of earth, which it grinds and pulverises, and which, like fortifications, form obstacles to the progress of steamers which it believes to be insur-

mountable. It creeps through the crevices of the banks, and transforms them into swamps; but nature brings forth from these swamps whole cypress-forests, whose interlacing roots form natural raft-like barriers. It rises up against the dikes, pierces them, overthrows them, and spreads itself abroad in a vast watery plain.

But in vain it shows itself untired. Man also is indefatigable. For there is no region more beautiful, no climate more delicious. The ancient enemy calls therefore to its aid a terrible auxiliary—yellow fever. Yet even this hideous scourge is being vanquished by sanitary measures and the triumphs of science.

Even where it has ravaged, nature daily grows more lovely.

There is scarcely, perhaps, any scene more striking than that presented in October by the river-marshes, when the mist of an Indian summer, floating gently over the brown waters like a sort of mirage, transforms the vine-garlanded trunks of the *tréés* into ruined colonnades stretching endlessly away into the distance; and around those gulfs of mud which the treacherous river is everywhere hollowing out, the palm-trees stand in groups, bound together like maypoles with streaming festoons of Spanish moss.

The river has other allies: the reptiles which twine round the branches, the alligators whose cries disturb the silence. Sometimes one sees suspended to a network of boughs a strange mass, which is an eagle's nest; while in the distance a big owl utters his prolonged and plaintive chant.

But to these hostile voices a village-bell responds ; or, from a neighbouring plantation there rings out reassuringly and consolingly some cheerful negro song.

Let us look further. Human labour boldly protests against these empty menaces. Charcoal-burners continue to throw tree after tree into their furnaces ; negroes go on rolling great bales of cotton towards the wharves ; your whole being is penetrated by the balmy odours exhaled from inextricable thickets of wood and fern.

It has been well said that the United States contain the only power that can fight the Mississippi, and conquer its revolts.

And this is true. To the Americans has been given a spirit so bold and so persevering that it shrinks from no effort, and is discouraged by no rebuff.

Some weeks after the scene described in our prologue, a great barge, laden with charcoal, was descending the stream of the Great River a few miles above New Orleans.

Evening was approaching. The clouds were gathering round the summits of the surrounding hills. The dark waters spread themselves out between their wide banks like the face of a mighty sea. The boats that carry on the navigation between St. Louis and New Orleans require special construction. The masses of mud which rise from the bed of the river prevent the use of deep keels : these vessels are therefore merely immense rafts, upon which formidable erections, almost like fortresses in appearance, are constructed.

The boat of which we speak was surmounted by a scaffolding composed of thick planks, which formed a vast shed, where tons of charcoal were piled.

In front, the smoke curled upwards from two chimneys, tall and black like the trunks of two poplar-trees. Above the scaffolding, a flat bridge, surrounded by a wooden gallery, and recalling to mind an Italian terrace by its form, supported a long cabin, terminating at one end in a sort of tower, upon which a sailor acted the part of watchman.

A shout was suddenly heard.

"Stop her! Back! A mud-bank!"

It was the captain who gave this order upon a signal from the watch. For, a few yards before them, there had all at once emerged, as if upheaved by some subterranean force, a blackish mass surmounted by a few branches of trees. It was one of those alluvial deposits which start up suddenly from the bed of the old river, as though to surprise and engulf imprudent vessels in their slimy depths.

At the captain's order, the powerful steam-engines attempted to perform their work. But the impetus already given was too great to be arrested by a single effort, and the bows of the *Black Boy*, which was the steamer's name, were already deeply embedded in the mud bank.

A storm of curses resounded from the bridge. The engines worked and the steam hissed forth more violently than ever, while the boat, with enormous force, tried to break or tear down the heavy barrier that impeded its progress. But in vain.

Fortunately the bow was caught on one side only, and the work of extrication was possible. Alas! the river succeeds in its treacherous designs only too often, and but too many vessels are engulfed in its watery depths!

There was a sudden movement on board the *Black Boy*, like that before a combat. At the captain's orders, twenty negroes threw themselves into the water and gained the bank, dragging with them enormous cables of rope and an iron chain.

As soon as they had landed, a buoy which had been thrown into the stream was drawn to the bank and hoisted up by the negroes' arms. It was a sort of block pierced with square holes, meant to serve the purpose of a windlass. Another buoy conveyed the long beams of wood which were to be fixed into the sockets prepared for them. The iron chain, bound to the fore-part of the boat, was fastened to the windlass: the men, hanging upon the beams, waited for the signal, and then, pushing vigorously, began to wind the chain round the moving block.

The Wasp—such is the nickname of the overseer whose special function it is to direct the negroes' work—stood at the distance of a few feet from his men, whom he encouraged by look and voice, and, it must needs be said, by exclamations of not the most orthodox character.

Upon the bank at this moment appeared some labourers belonging to a neighbouring farm, who looked on curiously—for there are idlers everywhere—and

seemed to regard the negroes' work with great interest. One could hear the creaking of the prow as it tore down the great black mass.

Suddenly the Wasp started. A whistle, so soft that no one else seemed to notice it, had reached his ear; it died away into a sort of jerky tune.

He turned round and glanced with apparent indifference at the group beside him; then, drawing back a little, approached a man who was sitting at one end of a block of wood, with an enormous stick beside him.

"What's the matter, Jack?" asked the Wasp in a low tone.

"The matter is, that the enemy's coming."

"What enemy do you mean?"

"The one who has his father to avenge."

The Wasp could hardly repress a slight shudder.

"You are mad! He is in Europe: he has not come to New Orleans by any steamer . . ."

"It is you who are mad! I tell you he is here—not far off . . . He came by rail to Natchez . . . and from there he is venturing to ride, in order to conceal his arrival more completely."

"How do you know?"

The other sneered—"Because I saw him."

"You?"

"Yes; and he is now in the Blue Hills, and will be at Crescent City to-morrow. Wait; I have not told you everything."

"What else?"

"He is not alone!"

"Ah ! who is with him ?"

"One whom you know well enough... Doctor Freedy."

The Wasp uttered a low growl.

"Freedy ! I am done for, then !"

"What a fool you are ! Don't I tell you that they are going over the Blue Hills to-night?"

"To-night ?"

The man reflected for a moment, then continued with a decided gesture—

"You are right. They must never reach New Orleans."

At this moment the iron chain accomplished its work with one last mighty effort, and the *Black Boy*, again at liberty, made ready to continue on its way.

The buoys were hauled up. Then the negroes, at the Wasp's command, threw themselves into the water and regained the boat.

But the Wasp himself did not follow them. And when his absence was discovered he was creeping away with his companion amongst the low brushwood and the scattered trunks of fallen trees.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLUE HILLS.

To the west of the Great River rise certain high hills, over which the heavy autumnal fogs rest long in threatening masses of sombre cloud. Exposed to the winds of the Mexican Gulf, these hills, which are constantly enveloped in a sort of bluish vapour, are ravaged at times by frightful tempests, which uproot and damage the trees to such a degree that, at the distance of only a few miles from the luxuriant vegetation of the river-banks, the scene presented is one of utter desolation.

At the very hour when the Wasp and his accomplice were exchanging mysterious confidences, five well-mounted persons were traversing one of the most sterile passes of these mountains, where a violent wind crisped the manes of the horses and played strange pranks with the cloaks of the travellers.

First of all came two ladies—one, because she was full of the rash bravery of youth ; the other, because her iron will compelled her never for one moment to lose sight of her young companion.

Then came three men, one of whom was lingering far behind—being the guide !

Suddenly the young girl stopped short and uttered a low cry.

"What is the matter, Alice?" cried the other.

"Come! come!" responded Alice. "The guide has deceived us. This road leads only to a precipice."

At these words the two men spurred forward their horses, and were almost immediately at the young girl's side.

Our readers will have recognised at once the persons who thus found themselves in the Blue Hills upon the western bank of the Mississippi.

When Alice, forcing back her horse upon its haunches, uttered the cry, "We are betrayed!" Valville sprang, as we have said, to her side at once; and gazing into the dark depths below, which seemed to lose themselves in nothingness, he could not repress a shudder of horror and alarm.

Not that he feared for himself. Valville was one of those men who hold life very cheap. But, for one second, a terrible doubt of his ultimate success awoke within him. Ever since he had again set foot upon American soil he had felt that he was enveloped in a network of hatred and of treason.

The steamer in which he had embarked at Liverpool belonged to one of those American companies, who, with utter carelessness of their passengers' lives, send out vessels which are thoroughly unseaworthy, and seem to hold together only by miracle. Before a third part of the voyage was over, the engines were so much damaged that it became necessary to work the ship by

means of the sails. The machinery was repaired more or less effectually; but everybody felt that another accident might happen at any moment.

And in fact a heavy sea injured the steamer so far as to destroy the greater portion of its rigging. And it was with great difficulty, after abandoning the project of coasting along Florida, that the captain managed to bring his ship as far as the mouth of the St. John's river. At this place the four passengers, exhausted by fatigue, caught a train that was on the point of starting for Louisiana.

But their troubles had only just begun.

The course of the train was interrupted between Blakely and Mobile by the breaking of a bridge. The only other way of arriving at New Orleans was by rejoining the Mobile line at Meridian, and returning to Jackson, the capital of the State of Mississippi, by a circuitous route. At Jackson they would be able to proceed by railway to their destination.

But at Mobile a singular event took place.

It is well known that Mobile is the capital of Alabama. It is a pretty town of 35,000 inhabitants—a quiet place, without much apparent commercial activity. Its chief thoroughfare, Government Street, is bordered by mansions of palatial magnificence. Beautiful gardens abound on every side, where great taste for horticulture is displayed. The foot-paths of the street are shaded by fine oak trees, and the great square between Dauphin Street and St. Francis Street is like an enormous basket of flowers beneath a dome of verdure. Everything is on a

large scale—streets, shops, and buildings. The air sweeps round the place in mighty currents, without let or hindrance.

But there is no outward life, no motion, no activity. In this respect the town is like one of the ancient fishing villages on the banks of the Mississippi when the fishermen themselves are absent. Yet there is at Mobile a brisk cotton trade and an ever-flowing stream of traffic.

During the last few years a Cotton Exchange has been established, and numbers already more than one hundred acting members. The bales of cotton which annually pass through Mobile must amount to three or four hundred thousand. The greater part of this merchandise is transmitted to the foreign vessels which crowd into the Lower Bay.

Nevertheless, Mobile has lost the high commercial rank which it enjoyed in olden days. But the advantages of its fine position, and the vast resources of the State of which it is the capital, may yet restore to it its past prosperity.

Constrained by circumstances to wait several hours at Mobile, Doctor Freedy employed his enforced leisure in visiting some friends. Valville, whose impatience became more and more feverish from day to day, at first refused to go with him; but yielding at last to his solicitations, and desirous also of paying his respects to the celebrated Admiral Semmes—one of the heroes of the late civil war,—the young man decided finally to accompany his friend.

As they were crossing Dauphin Street they met a

peculiar-looking individual, who, advancing from an opposite direction, came straight upon them, and appeared to be greatly surprised at the meeting. He stared full into Doctor Freedy's face, and seemed inclined to stop, but finally resumed his onward way.

"Do you know that man?" asked Valville.

"Yes, and no."

"Which means . . . ?"

"That I have met him before," said the American, in his usual phlegmatic manner; "but that I do not know him."

"Do explain yourself more clearly."

"My dear Valville, to know any one is to be ready to meet him; to go and speak to him, perhaps to shake hands with him. You understand me?"

"You mean that this man is unworthy of our interest in him?"

"A bad rendering. I would not speak to him; I would not sit down by him; I would go out of any house that I was in if he entered it; but" . . . and he laid strong emphasis on the words, "I am very much interested in him."

"Really, Freedy, you speak in riddles."

"Wait: I will explain it all directly. At present, just turn round quickly and look behind you."

Valville obeyed. There, about a hundred yards behind them, in front of Barton Academy, trying to hide himself behind a willow fence which protected one of the trees, stood the man whom they had passed, gazing after them eagerly. He was taken by surprise by Valville's quick movement, and drew himself quickly into

the shade. This man wore a typical costume. It consisted of a short coat of coarse cloth, torn and dirty, trousers tucked into thick-soled boots reaching to the knee, and a soft felt hat on the back of his head. As for his face, it was thin, long, and bony. A goat's beard on his chin, widening into a sort of fan-shape, completed the portrait, which was certainly not very attractive.

"That man wants to play the spy on us," said Valville. "Although I have been away from America for some years, I recognise the type of those adventurers, fortune-seekers who shrink from nothing; and I should guess that beneath the band that joins his waistcoat and his trousers there are hidden at least a revolver and a bowie-knife."

The bowie-knife is a sort of cutlass with a very sharp blade, which has played, and still plays, an important rôle in all American quarrels.

"Well guessed," said Freedy. "And during the disturbances of the Kellogg election at New Orleans, I nearly made close acquaintance with the said bowie-knife, which accounts for the great interest which he is manifesting in me."

"He tried to kill you?"

"Assuredly. But what astonishes me," added Freedy with a smile, "is that he should be still alive; for I threw him out of a window of the St. Louis Hotel, sometimes called the Capitol of New Orleans . . ."

"Good! then I don't wonder that he wants to stop and look at you," said Valville, laughing in spite of himself; "but are you not afraid that he will try to revenge

himself upon you for the leap that you made him take?"

"My dear Valville, I think that you have forgotten a great deal since your departure, and that you have much to learn. Of course a 'scalawag' always tries to revenge himself. But wait a moment," added Freedy, imposing silence by a gesture upon Valville, who was about to interrupt him and to ask the meaning of the term 'scalawag;'" "we must first show this honest personage that we are not afraid of him. In America, as everywhere else, assassins are always cowards. If you don't want a hyena to throw itself upon you, you must walk straight up to it."

"Do you think he would attempt anything . . . here . . . in the open street?"

"Note, if you please, that in the open street at Mobile we are more alone at midday than we should be at midnight in the obscurest corner of Paris. Follow me."

And drawing down his elbows close to his sides, Freedy began to run in the direction of the Academy. But when they reached the tree behind which they had seen the man conceal himself, they found that he had disappeared.

"This is miraculous," cried Valville.

"No miracle at all," said Freedy coldly. "Men of this kind—bandits, to tell the truth—who have been miners at San Francisco and trappers in the Rocky Mountains, who are in the pay of the White League to-day, and will be soldiers of the Black League to-

morrow,—these men have all the habits as well as all the cruelty of savages. A ‘scalawag’ is a sort of pariah in revolt, self-exiled from society; a guerilla chief, as the Spaniards say, who hovers upon the flanks of the great army of workers, until some of them, separated from the others and alone, fall into his ambuscades; then such a man can kill and steal at will. Having tried everything, and believing no longer in the power of work, he expects everything from chance; and it must be said that here some ‘scalawags’ do succeed; as soon as their travestied piracy has procured a galleon for them, or their pockets are full of dollars and bank-notes, then they lift up their heads and reclaim their places in society. You see the kind of ruffians they are: the sore spot in American society and the Southern States, where the strife that still subsists between the black and white races continually gives them fresh facilities for action. They are the brigands of ancient legend, but they do not keep to the forests like those of old. In the great towns, such as Houston, Galveston, and New Orleans, they lie in ambush, ready to profit by any sort of political skirmish or electioneering excitement; ready always and above all to provoke the troubles by which they know how to profit. It is a very army of evil, and I tell you it is a large one! . . .”

Struck by a sudden idea, Valville interrupted him.

“These are the wretches that killed my father?” . . .

“As to that,” said Freedy with a mournful smile, “the case is different: and in a minute we shall hear something more about it.”

"How so?"

"Let us go in," said Freedy, indicating with his hand the door of the St. Borromeo Hotel, one of those vast caravanserais beside which the Paris Grand Hotel would look, as far as size goes, like a country inn.

Here Alice and Madame Longpré, exhausted with fatigue, were snatching a few hours' rest.

The two men had scarcely passed through the immense portico, threading their way with difficulty through the piles of wooden cases and trunks that rose before them like broken fragments of Cyclopean architecture, when a negro servant approached them.

"A telegram for Doctor Freedy," he said.

The doctor took the paper that was presented to him, and drew Valville into one of the rooms on the ground-floor where several men were sitting at tables, swallowing great bumpers of whisky.

Valville was very pale. For had not Freedy told him that he was about to hear fresh news on the subject of his father's murder?

Since his departure from France, the young man had suffered terribly. Is there anything worse than to see yourself condemned to forced inaction by ignorance and impotence, to count the hours and the miles which separate you from the land where those you love have shed their blood, and to be compelled to restrain your anger and your impatience to avenge their wrongs?

Sometimes at night, when Valville stood alone upon the deck, his eyes fixed upon the dark expanse of sea that surged around him, it seemed as though he could

see a spectral form rise from the waves and stretch its arms to him ; as though he could hear a voice that called him to the rescue !

But what could he do ? By what supernatural power could he have hastened the course of the vessel which bore him slowly—oh, so slowly!—to America ? His sisters' voices seemed to call him also. The account received by Freedy, and partially confirmed by another vague report before Valville's departure, told only of their disappearance. But this word was more horrible, more alarming, than any other. The young man shuddered, and dared not think of it.

At Jacksonville, the port where he landed in Florida, he had thrown himself into the train which was just starting, without finding a moment's time in which to telegraph to New Orleans. By degrees a dreary torpor seemed to take possession of him. He was conscious of a sensation of indifference which resembled the fatalism of an Oriental. He was ready to let fate lead him whither it would, and felt that he could neither direct nor control it. At Mobile he was utterly depressed and disheartened. He began to fear that when he accepted the sacrifice made by Alice and her adopted mother, he had assumed a graver responsibility than he ought to have done, yet it was too late to draw back.

But Freedy was on the watch. This cold American, master of a calm energy which did not expend itself in useless outer show, had telegraphed at once to New Orleans. And he had just received the answer to his telegram.

"Read it! read it!" said Valville, whose voice trembled with feverish impatience.

"It is in cipher," said Freedy. "It will take me a few minutes to read."

He drew from his pocket a small note-book, the pages of which were covered with a network of lines, figures and letters, something like telegraphic shorthand.

Then he began to read in a low voice:—

"Mr. Valville dead. House burnt down on the night of the tenth of October. Negroes fled: some of them certainly accomplices. Valville killed by a pistol-shot on the verandah. Of the two sisters, one was found next day in a dying state on the borders of a 'bayou,' or marshy stream, with severe scalp-wound. Better now. The other sister disappeared. All search for her vain up to present date. Grave suspicions. Struggle between blacks and whites imminent. Other fires in Louisiana. Great conspiracy organised. Prudence necessary. Ned Bark takes charge of affairs. Faithful and clever. Charles Valville must not go direct to New Orleans, but to Woodman's house at Pontchartrain. This telegram will serve as introduction. There let him wait for Ned Bark. Plan will be formed. Will come myself. Beware of carpet-baggers and scalawags. Leave railway, where your arrival will be telegraphed. Once at Covington, go over Blue Hills. Five hours' ride to Woodman's house."

Valville had risen.

"Ah! you see, Freedy!" he exclaimed. "Not a minute to lose!"

Freedy remained thoughtful.

"Yes," he murmured to himself, "this seems to be the symptom of some new and terrible convulsion of our poor country. Ah, Louisiana! those are right who call you 'Paradise Lost!' But it shall yet be 'Paradise Regained!'"

Valville repeated his appeal with impatience.

"Charles," said Freedy, "you have made a great mistake in bringing Miss Lodier and her aunt with you. We must get them to go immediately to New Orleans. There they can be received into some French family, where they will wait for you without incurring the dangers to which we are sure to be exposed. I will go and speak to the ladies, Valville, and try to obtain their consent."

Freedy pleaded his cause eloquently, but in vain. The courageous Alice, upon hearing of the perils which threatened the man who was as dear to her as a husband, was resolved to share them with him. As to Madame Longpré, she would allow nobody to dictate to her concerning her conduct. She had long passed the age for receiving advice.

She was an energetic little woman, with an extraordinary reserve of strength hidden beneath a delicate appearance. She had always loved romance, and was delighted to throw herself blindly in the way of an adventure. Moreover, Alice had said she would not be separated from Charles. And as she always appropriated Alice's decisions to herself, she was quite convinced that this one was her own, and nothing in the world

could have modified what she was pleased to call her resolution, unless Alice had changed her mind.

Freedy repressed an inclination to shrug his shoulders, but accepted the inevitable.

An hour later a carriage, or sort of covered coach, was conveying the four travellers along one of the lonely roads which connect Alabama and Louisiana. In twenty hours they found themselves at the foot of the Blue Hills, a group of hills of some considerable height, which appear to be the last vestiges of those high mountains which the waters of the Mississippi have little by little undermined, and carried down to the marshes.

Here Freedy discovered, to his great regret, that the travellers would not be able to traverse these unknown mountain-paths without a guide.

At some miles' distance from Covington the carriage stopped for a time on the banks of one of those marshy creeks, which, flowing at the foot of the hills whose outlines are sharply defined against the horizon, announce the vicinity of the Mississippi.

A man was there, seemingly indifferent to everything that passed, smoking his pipe, and letting his horse drink the marshy water.

He turned his head when he heard the sound of wheels, then resumed his former immobility.

Freedy accosted him in order to ask which was the shortest way to their destination.

The man took his pipe out of his mouth and spat on the ground before he answered.

"Where are you going?" he said.

"To Pontchartrain."

"Do you think you'll get there alone?" said the man sneeringly.

"Alone or in company, what does it matter? Tell us the way."

"It matters a good deal if you want to get there!—The Blue Hills are not very high, but they are as dangerous as most other mountains."

The result of this colloquy was that the man proved willing to earn a few dollars by acting as guide to the travellers.

The opportuneness of his offer caused some uneasiness to Doctor Freedy. But how could it be supposed that this man was an emissary of their unknown enemies?

As night came on, they resumed their course.

Seeing that the carriage could not be taken through the steep mountain-passes, it had been left at Covington at a very innocent-looking sort of farm, which possessed chickens, ducks, a watch-dog, and, as usual, the inevitable fan-palm with its great fronds fluttering in the wind. The four travellers then proceeded on horseback.

We have seen how Alice suddenly discovered that their guide had deceived them. The surrounding solitude was full of shadows: before them was a deep and wide crevasse, down which they had very nearly been precipitated; and in the distance the flying hoofs of a retreating horseman could be heard. The pretended guide had taken at once to flight.

"Ruffian!" cried Valville, discharging his revolver at hazard in the direction of the fugitive.

"The fellow is far enough away by this time," said Freedy coldly. "But he betrayed himself too soon. The night is not yet so dark but that we may succeed in regaining our way. In the first place let us turn back. You, ladies, must go in the middle : I will go first, and Valville last : eyes open, and finger on the trigger."

"Dear Alice !" Charles whispered to the girl. "Who can tell whether I am not leading you to death ?"

"Must we not live and die together ?" she answered gently.

Madame Longpré had bravely drawn a revolver from the little bag that hung at her waist, and brandished it in the most heroic manner.

"Forward !" said Freedy.

In a few minutes they had reascended the slope down which they had just come. The fog thickened around them like a belt of darkness as they went.

Freedy stopped. He began to see that to wander onwards in this obscurity would be madness. The man who had misled them had plotted well : the least false step might lead them to instant destruction.

"Wait for me !" cried Freedy.

And he plunged resolutely into one of the footpaths that he saw before him.

But hardly had he proceeded more than a few steps when a pistol-shot rang in his ear, and a long sharp cry resounded through the night.

Struck with alarm, Freedy turned his horse's head abruptly round, and rapidly returned to the plateau that he had just left.

CHAPTER III.

SAMBO.

DOCTOR FREEDY was not the man to be moved by idle fears. He had proved his energy and his courage a hundred times: yet when he heard that pistol-shot, followed by that hoarse shriek, his whole frame was shaken as if by fear.

The night had grown very dark.

“Courage! here I am!” cried Freedy, with his finger on the trigger of his revolver.

But at the same instant a well-known voice responded—

“Here!—to the left!”

It was Valville who spoke.

At the same time a tall, black, fantastic-looking figure rose up in front of Freedy’s horse, and laid a hand upon the bridle.

Freedy resolutely covered him with his revolver.

But the glare of a lighted torch suddenly illumined the scene; and Valville, seeing Freedy’s threatening gesture to the man whom he took for an enemy, dashed forward, crying—

“Don’t fire, Freedy! He has saved our lives!”

"Without poor Sambo," said the unknown, who was a negro of colossal stature, "you die over the precipice."

As he spoke, Sambo—for such was the negro's name—pointed towards a depth of shadow to which Freedy, deceived by the darkness, had been rapidly directing his way at the moment when the black man's hand seized his horse's bridle.

"You are all safe and sound?" asked Freedy.

"All!" answered Valville, raising his torch, and revealing the two women, who had left their horses, and seemed to be bestowing their care upon an apparently wounded man. This man lay upon the ground at a few yards' distance from the precipice; but Freedy could not see his face,

"What has happened?" he enquired.

"Only Sambo can tell us," said Valville. "One thing is certain—that we were about to fall into a snare, and that this good fellow saved us."

"Sambo's life is yours, massa," replied the negro affectionately.

"But that man on the ground?"—

"Was simply a bandit who was waiting to fire on us, hidden in the brushwood by the pathway. But Sambo, an old servant of my father's, rose up all at once, rushed upon the wretched fellow, and, snatching his gun from him, fired, and put a bullet into his head."

Freedy sprang from his horse, and walked quickly towards the little group formed by the two women and the wounded man.

The man had received a wound upon the head, from

which the blood fell fast and formed a pool upon the ground; his eyes were shut, and a reddish foam was gathering upon his writhing lips, which trembled convulsively.

"I know this man!" cried Freedy suddenly. "It is Dick Salter, nicknamed the Wasp; a sort of overseer on board the charcoal-barges which ply between Louisville and New Orleans on the Mississippi."

Alice had been trying to bandage the wounded head, and to stop the bleeding, with all the womanly tenderness which forgets the crime of a criminal at the sight of his suffering: she now looked up and addressed herself to Freedy.

"Doctor," she said, "he will die: can you not save him?"

Freedy had also knelt down, and with skilful fingers was touching the wounded head.

"Lower the torch," he said.

For some moments he continued his examination, last of all raising the man's eyelid, so as to see the pupil of his eye.

"He is dying. The ball has penetrated his brain."

"But cannot he speak?" cried Valville. "Can he not, even at the last moment, confess his crime, and name the assassins whose tool he has surely been?"

"Perhaps," said Doctor Freedy.

He returned to his horse, and opened a little bag which hung from the saddle, and which contained a traveller's medicine-chest. From this he took a small phial, and, returning to the wounded man, forced his

teeth open with the blade of his knife, and poured down his throat a few drops of some colourless liquid.

Sambo stood calmly by, with his hands crossed over the gun.

This African, whose enormous outline was clearly revealed by the yellow torchlight, was a veritable giant roughly hewn in bronze. His black woolly hair, his big lips, his glistening white teeth and bright eyes, all contributed to lend a most fantastic appearance to this strange wild being.

Who was he? How had he come to the Blue Hills? Why did he call Valville "massa," and say that his life belonged to him? All this will be presently explained.

Meanwhile the drops of liquid swallowed by the dying man, were gradually producing upon him a great effect, which every moment increased.

"Do you hear me, Dick Salter?" said Freedy; "and will you answer me?"

The name thus pronounced evidently reached the ruffian's ear, for suddenly his eyes opened and rolled wildly in their sockets, his lips moved, and, amidst half-audible oaths, the words were heard—

"Freedy! Curse you!"

"I know you," said Freedy; "you tried to kill me once before: you are in the pay of the scalawags of Louisiana. Who sent you here? Why did you wish to commit murder? Whom would you have killed?"

"You! you!" groaned the dying man, grinding his teeth; "and then the other one—Valville! After the father, the son! a cursed race!"

"You are one of my father's murderers!" cried Valville, almost beside himself. He advanced with up-listed hand, as if he could have struck the man, but Freedy arrested his arm.

"We do not punish the dead! Let him speak: and let him receive our last forgiveness!"

The miserable man writhed as he lay upon the earth.

"Die? no, no! I will not die!"

"You are condemned," said Freedy solemnly. "So, speak."

"Then . . . if I speak . . . you will save me?" he asked, digging his nails into the ground in his agony.

"No," said Freedy. "You are punished: it is all over with you; but I say to you, before you die show at least some sorrow for your crime: name your accomplices. You are only a soldier in a robber's band: name your chief."

"My chief?" moaned the man, whose voice was failing and dying away in strangled sobs of agony. "Yes, I will name him! for when you hear his name, you will know, you—you, too!—that you are condemned to death! . . ."

"His name!"

"His name is Red Ralph!"

"Red Ralph!" exclaimed Freedy.

"Yes, Red Ralph. Now you tremble, do you not, Doctor Freedy? You tremble, you, son of the planter Valville? . . . Ah, the fair Jeanne—your sister! . . ."

He could not complete his sentence. Terrible gasps

escaped his breast. His stiffened body was arched in one last convulsion, and then he fell back . . . dead!

Valville's face was livid.

"Speak! speak again!" he cried, seizing the dead man by the arm.

"He will be silent now for ever," said Freedy solemnly.

He passed his hand over his brow, and then said energetically—

"Come! to horse! Let us get out of these accursed mountain-passes."

"Yes," said Sambo, who had assisted at this sad scene without betraying a single sign of emotion; "me lead you—in two hours reach Pontchartrain."

"Do you know the Woodman Plantation?" asked Valville.

"Me come from there," said the negro.

"And we can be there in safety in two hours?"

"Yes; me promise."

Overcome with emotion, Alice had fallen on her knees by the wayside. How courageous soever a woman may be, she is never without feeling; her very strength, when it is even most heroic, is full of gentleness.

It was the first time that Alice had witnessed a death-scene; and as she knelt beside the dead body, she gave way to a passion of mournful tears. Her aunt, not less touched, was yet outwardly much more composed.

Valville approached them, and gently begged them to mount their horses again.

Alice lifted her head and looked at him.

"What!" she said, "are we to abandon this poor man?"

"We must," replied Freedy. "Is not the high-road the robber's battle-field? There he fights and there he dies; it is only just."

It was moreover impossible for the travellers to encumber themselves with the ghastly burden. This Alice could understand; but could not the body be protected from the attacks of wild beasts?

Valville and Freedy explained to her that both time and tools were wanting to dig the man a grave, and with a deep sigh the girl turned at last to go.

"Alas!" she whispered to Valville, "may this desperation not bring misfortune upon us!"

"Are we not undertaking mortal combat?" answered Charles. "Dismiss these vain fears, dear Alice, and remember that whenever the rights of humanity speak louder than my duty, I shall be the first to respect them. But at present it is your life and that of your second mother of which we must think before everything."

The little procession then proceeded on its way.

Sambo walked first, close to Freedy, who, plunged in thought, repeated from time to time in low tones the name which the dying man had uttered.

"Red Ralph!" he murmured; "as long as that man lives we shall never be out of danger! And Valville knows nothing, for the name left him perfectly calm! Some day, however, he will have to hear the whole story."

Then addressing himself to Sambo, he said—

"Tell me, please, how you became aware of the danger that we were incurring; and, first of all, why did you call Charles Valville your master? Do you belong to the Battle Field Plantation?"

"Yes," answered the negro; "I tell you, I would give my life for him, though I could not give it for his father."

We will not continue to place in the mouth of the negro that broken dialect of which we gave a very short specimen at the beginning of the chapter. Besides, the reader should know that the negro language—which has been too often travestied by novelists who are acquainted with it only by tradition—does not consist at all of this phonographic sort of patois. It is really a mixture of different languages, which by slow degrees is forming a new dialect, composed of English, French, Spanish, and Indian. It resembles some of the African tongues in sound.

It is easy to write "Me hab good massa!" "Little nigger do dis!" but no negro ever really talked in this way. Negro-songs, like negro-words, require faithful translation. They have a special charm and fitness which are completely lost when they pass into another language. Therefore Sambo shall henceforward speak like other people.

"You are very much attached to the Valville family?"

"Oh yes! how could I be otherwise? I owe my life to poor Mr. Valville, whom I was not able to defend."

"How was that?"

"Twenty years ago," said Sambo, "in the times of slavery—when that frightful institution which lowered

us below the level of brutes had grown more oppressive and cruel than it had ever been before—I belonged to a planter at Natchez, the most ferocious master who ever tortured my brother-men; and that villain, Dick Salter, was the overseer of his negroes. Never a week passed without the death of some one of us beneath the lash, or other refinements of cruelty that those monsters loved to invent for us. My father, sir, my father"—and here the negro could scarcely restrain his tears—"my father was one day condemned by Dick Salter—that man whom the young lady regretted to surrender to the wild beasts and the crows—to receive fifty blows, not on the shoulders, but on the face and chest. Do you understand? An old man! And what had he done? what crime had he committed? Perhaps, worn out by fatigue, he had fallen asleep beneath a palm-tree: besides, do you think these men wanted motives, pretexts? No; they struck and killed because they liked to do so. And just then, too, dark rumours were current in the Southern States. The martyr John Brown had fallen at Harper's Ferry; possible revolt was contemplated, and we must be kept down by terror! In truth, it was enough to terrify the boldest! To return to my father's fate . . ."

Each time that he uttered this beloved name, the negro trembled as if he had been seized by ague.

"In vain the negroes on the plantation—even those who, by some act of cowardice or treason, had gained the master's favour—begged him to spare the old man. In vain they appealed to the pretended magistrate, the

so-called syndic of the negroes, who, instead of defending or protecting them, was too often the accomplice of their executioners. The punishment was upheld, and I saw the poor trembling old man tied up in broad daylight to an oak-beam placed crosswise in the middle of the cotton-field ; and Dick Salter, the wretch, was charged with the execution of the sentence. How was it that I did not spring forward and snatch him from the arms of death ? Can you guess why?—My father had commanded me to live : he wished, poor martyr ! that his death should be an example to us all ; and with the pride of his race he defied the tormentors ! The whip fell—it tore open his forehead, his eyes, his mouth, his nose—it laid bare the muscles, and crushed the flesh ! At the fiftieth blow my father shouted, ‘Liberty ! liberty !’ and died. Yes, he was free ! But I was maddened—I was resolved : my father’s cry was his command that I should work for the emancipation of my brothers. That very night I fled from the Natchez plantation. Where did I go ? I know not : by chance, across the treacherous forest, less cruel than mankind : amongst alligators and panthers that seemed to me less terrible ! but I was young then—little more than a child. I did not know what peril, what fatigue awaits the path of a runaway slave. I lost myself. Hoping to get further and further away, I doubled ; and yet I was very few miles from that accursed plantation.

“On the third morning I suddenly awoke from a sleep of several hours’ duration, and heard the sound of shouts and horses’ hoofs which were rapidly approaching.

"I shuddered in terror : the men-hunters, Dick Salter and other ruffians, were on my track, accompanied by those horrible dogs which our persecutors had trained to hunt down human game.

"I sprang up, hoping to escape them. I tried to gain the river. There, I thought, I would throw myself into the rapid stream, and, thanks to my strength, I could fly!—fly across a marshy tract of land, broken and insecure by reason of small streams as it was! But in vain I gathered up all my strength, in vain I exerted my muscles; every minute I stumbled and fell; and the horses' gallop came nearer and nearer: I was surrounded by enemies on all sides. Every road, every pathway where a horse's hoof could be set, was guarded. I was hiding in a marsh where monstrous toads were creeping and serpents twining round my knees—my clothes were torn to rags upon my shoulders—and for more than thirty hours I had eaten nothing. I felt my strength failing: my temples throbbed. If I had had to fight men only! But just behind me, a few paces off, I heard the panting breath of one of my master's dogs! I confess it, I grew icy-cold with terror!—Oh, those dogs, those lovers of human flesh! I had seen them at their work! I knew what their fierceness could be like when stimulated by the fierceness of men! The enormous animal, with bleeding muzzle, had scented me out, and for one moment I turned and saw the hideous creature, whose head crashed through the reeds behind me. I sprang forward with a cry, but in vain! a violent shock prostrated me, a horrible feeling of hair and foam was on my breast, great

crooked fangs were about to bury themselves in my neck—I was lost ! With straining hands I tried to choke off the monster . . .

“ Suddenly a shot was heard, and the pressure relaxed. The body of the brute grew rigid, and was shaken by a violent spasm : then it dropped dead at my feet.

“ Thirty yards off a man was running towards me with a gun from which the smoke was still rising. And at the same moment Dick Salter and his men were at my side. ‘ Who fired ? Who killed my dog ? ’ he cried in a paroxysm of rage.

“ I had instinctively flown to my protector, and bending one knee to the ground, I pressed my lips to his hand. He did not repulse me, but said loudly—

“ ‘ I killed that dog.’

“ ‘ You ! very well,’ cried Dick. ‘ Your life for his ! ’ And he pointed his gun towards the stranger. But before he touched the trigger, a ball had shattered the weapon in his hand ; and the shot had been fired with such skill that the ruffian himself was not wounded. He uttered a howl of rage, and called to his companions—

“ ‘ Fire ! fire ! ’

“ Mr. Valville—for, as you must guess, it was no other—then said quite calmly—

“ ‘ My name is Valville, and this negro belongs to me.’

“ His name produced a singular effect. Dick Salter started, while the others exchanged uneasy looks. There

were two causes for this sudden change. The Valville family, of French origin, having held large estates for more than a hundred years, had a reputation of which no one could be ignorant: Mr. Charles's father was particularly noted, both for his humanity, and for the almost miraculous feats of skill and strength which were attributed to him. Also, though I did not hear of this still more powerful reason for some time afterwards, the Natchez planter owed him a considerable sum of money, and it was only through his generosity that my master had not been completely ruined long before.

"Dick Salter," said Mr. Valville, "now that you know my name, consider yourself lucky that I do not put a bullet into your head. I have told you that this negro belongs to me. See here"—and he drew a paper from his pocket-book—"this is a note of hand of your master's, due to-morrow for five thousand dollars. Bring me this evening the bill of sale for this negro, and I will remit to your master the note of hand at once."

"I was weeping, trembling, choking with emotion. Dick Salter hesitated: not that he doubted the readiness of his master to make such a profitable bargain, but because his cruel nature regretted the loss of its dominion over me. But Mr. Valville knew how to control the wretch, who at last bowed and rode away, not without a parting glance of bitter hate at me.

"From that day forward, the Battle Field Plantation became my home—a home, oh, how happy! until that fearful night when I had been sent by my master to New Orleans, and those assassins burnt the house and killed

Mr. Valville. Are you surprised now that I said my life belonged to Mr. Charles?"

At this moment the little party quitted the rugged paths and emerged upon the open plain. The faint light of dawn became visible in the east. For the present all immediate danger was over.

"But how did you learn the plans of this wretched Dick Salter?" asked Freedy. "How was it that you arrived in time to strike him down?"

"In this way," said the negro. "You know that Miss Lucile—the daughter of Mr. Valville who was found wounded at some distance from the plantation—was received into the house of Mr. Woodman, the planter of Pontchartrain, who was an intimate friend of Mr. Valville. You understand that I could not abandon my dear mistress—when I grieve so deeply for my dear master and for Miss Jeanne . . ."

"Do you think those villains have killed her?"

"Who knows?" said the negro, lifting his eyes to heaven. "We cannot tell whether to hope or fear!"

"Go on with your story."

"Well, yesterday evening, I noticed, near one of the creeks which surround the house, a man who seemed to be proceeding towards the Blue Hills. Now Mr. Woodman knew that you would come by that route. The man in question was soon joined by another, and they conversed together. A ray of light that fell upon the face of one of them showed me that it was Dick Salter. It was long since I had seen him. My first impulse was to spring forward and kill him on the spot;

but I saw that he was taking leave of his companion, and that he then shouldered his gun and made for the hills. A sudden suspicion crossed my mind, and I put myself on his track—so carefully that he should not even guess what unseen shadow followed him! Used to the darkness, my eyes never lost sight of him for a moment: all at once I saw another man riding at full speed from the heights, who called to him: ‘Quick! they are coming!’ Dick Salter answered, ‘I shall be there.’ And he began to run, mounting the hills with great swiftness; yet still I followed. At last I saw him crouch down behind a clump of brushwood. With his finger on the trigger, there he waited. You know the rest! I saw the muzzle of his weapon pointed to the breast of Mr. Charles: I sprang upon him, and I avenged my father by saving my benefactor’s son!”

“If I am not mistaken, I can see from here the outbuildings of Mr. Woodman’s plantation?” asked Doctor Freedy.

Upon an affirmative sign from the negro, the doctor turned round to his friend.

“We are approaching the end of our journey, Valville,” he said, as the three riders advanced.

Valville held out his hand to Sambo.

“You saved us,” he said; “but remember that a terrible task still remains for us to accomplish.”

Raising his hat, he added—

“Father, I swear that you shall be avenged.”

Sambo ran in the direction of the plantation, beckoning to the little cavalcade to follow him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BATTLE FIELD TRAGEDY.

NOTWITHSTANDING all their energy, Madame Longpré and Alice were completely exhausted by fatigue when, guided by Sambo, they reached the plantation.

Day had broken, but a grey fog from the lake still hung over the wide fields and covered the buildings as with a thick veil, behind which their forms could very faintly be discerned.

Upon entering one of the gates, Sambo uttered a loud whistle, and almost immediately a crowd of servants, both black and white, pressed forward to meet the travellers.

At the same moment Mr. Woodman also appeared.

He was a man of high stature, dressed in a grey suit, which fitted closely to his figure, and showed to admirable advantage the strength of his mighty limbs. As soon as his eye fell upon Valville, he advanced to meet him.

Without speaking, but recognising in Woodman a sincere and tried old friend of his father's, the young man, consumed by a fever of sorrow and anxiety, threw himself upon his neck and burst into tears.

"My father!" he cried. "My poor father!" Woodman pressed him to his breast, and spoke in a grave, kind voice.

"Take courage, my boy," he said, "do not be cast down. Your father was a good man and a brave worker; weep for him, but remember that he has left you others to care for still."

They were approaching the house. Just then the door opened, and a young girl appeared: a girl whose forehead was covered by a linen bandage. A double cry resounded through the air.

"Charles! my dear brother!"

"My sister Lucile!"

It was indeed Valville's elder daughter; and the linen bandage hid from sight the mark of the horrible and mysterious wound that she had received: mysterious, we say, because that monstrous attempt to scalp her proved that there must have been found, in the ranks of the bandits, one of the miserable descendants of the great Indian race, degraded to the level of incendiaries and assassins. Wheresoever hatred and cruelty can be found, it is there that the 'scalawags' recruit their ranks!

Repressing the tears that filled her eyes, and withdrawing herself from her brother's arms, Lucile turned to the two ladies. At the first glance Lucile and Alice felt that they were indeed sisters; and as the young Parisian was pale and trembling with exhaustion, Lucile led her, with Madame Longpré, quickly towards the house.

"My dear brother," she said to Valville, "I have not forgotten the traditions of hospitality which our father left us ; you may count upon me."

"But where is Jeanne? Jeanne!" cried the young man, whose hands clenched themselves with pain as he thought of his other sister.

Lucile appeared to hesitate ; then running suddenly to his side, she put her arms round her brother's neck, and whispered in his ear :

"You will soon know all ! but just now I can only tell you that Jeanne is courageous and indomitable : and," she added more slowly, "she would prefer death to dishonour."

"Dishonour!" cried Charles. "What does that terrible word mean?"

Lucille referred him to Mr. Woodman.

"Our friend, our kind protector will tell you all."

"Ah, come! come!" exclaimed Valville, seizing the planter by the hand. "However horrible the story may be, promise me to hide nothing!"

And the two men moved off towards a group of palm-trees, followed by Freedy, who had been silently gazing at the graceful picture presented by Lucile as she conducted her new friends into the house.

"Now," said Woodman, "Charles Valville, listen to me, and summon all your strength ; for I have terrible things to tell you.

"I must first recal to your mind certain events which you may have forgotten, for your father kept you carefully apart from political dissensions ; but the facts to

which I am about to refer, are, in my opinion, intimately connected with the horrible catastrophe which cost my poor friend Valville his life.

" You know, my dear fellow, that your father and I were ardent partisans of the cause of freedom, and that during the war we both fought boldly in the Northern army. This is enough to show you that the rights of humanity always found defenders in us, and that our opinions, whatever they might be, were based, not on prejudices which we entertained, but upon real interest in a nation which has been so long down-trodden, and which we aided to recover its liberty.

" I know that in France these facts are little known ; and during your long residence on the other side of the ocean, it must no doubt have been difficult for you to form any opinion concerning the events that took place in your native country ; especially in view of the contradictory accounts that the press put forward on all sides.

" But this is the truth, which I will place before you as briefly as I can.

" Among the emancipated negroes, a great number, I may say the majority, endeavour to make themselves worthy of the rights they have regained. Certainly it is very difficult for them to conquer their old idleness and natural indifference. But, little by little, good education, united with a proper sense of their own true interests, and the claims of family affection, come to our aid as we try to help the poor creatures ; and I may safely affirm that on the Valville plantation, as on my

own, we have reason to congratulate ourselves upon having to do with men, and not with slaves.

"In time, with perseverance, we shall arrive at the epoch of the fusion of both races; and the era of prosperity, interrupted by the war, will again begin: this time to be more durable and more complete than ever.

"But is it necessary to explain to you how this terrible war, almost unexampled in the annals of humanity, has left behind it a legacy of half-healed enmities, of desired revenge, and vengeance only adjourned and not abjured? In the opinion of the partisans of slavery, their defeat is not irremediable; and more than one amongst them longs to dismember the great Republic.

"There are even men who, irritated at the recovered glory of our old Republic, seek to drive it into anarchy, and to excite disturbances, hoping that in the hour of peril its pretended deliverers—themselves the authors of the dangers incurred—will be enabled to seize the reins of supreme power.

"These men, knowing that they are despised by the working portion of the community, dare not throw off their mask and proclaim aloud their wish to re-establish the old despotism of the white race over the black. Do you know what, in their skilled hypocrisy, they are trying to do?

"With Machiavellian astuteness, they incite the black race to every kind of excess. They appeal to the cruel and ambitious passions which cannot fail to exist in a certain portion of a population, degraded first by slavery, and then intoxicated by liberation. Of these negroes, who were

formerly slaves, they are constructing unconscious instruments for the re-establishment of slavery. In one word, they wish that, disgusted by the follies, the excesses, the brutality of the negroes, the white men should again reduce them to subjection. They stimulate these unfortunates, who are more ignorant than guilty, by ceaselessly repeating that to them alone should power belong, that in their turn they ought to take office and exercise over the South an absolute dominion, and, in fact, reduce their former masters to social slavery. Who are the men who have designed this frightful scheme? Do not think that they are the merchants, the planters, the workers of the country! No: these, even if they were formerly friends of slavery, have accepted the freedom of the negroes as an established fact, and they are working with might and main to accomplish the industrial renovation under the most favourable conditions possible.

"At the head of this destructive party—the party of a secret reaction—are placed the adventurers who never possessed a foot of land in Louisiana: 'scalawags', pariahs of civilisation, who infest America throughout, in search of fortune to be gained without work: men, in fact, who are often called 'carpet-baggers.' And these persons, who come from no one knows where, make their appearance in every case of crime or disturbance—all their worldly wealth consisting in a carpet-bag and a revolver at their belt.

"Our friend here, Doctor Freedy, will confirm my words. When in September 1874, the rioters of the negro party suddenly took possession of the Capitol and claimed

the civil authority by means of an armed force ; when the adventurer, William Pitt Kellogg, deposed the legal governor, Warmouth, as also MacEnery and Penn, the most respected men in Louisiana, and substituted in their place the negro porter, Pinchbeck, formerly croupier at a gaming-table ; when blood flowed in Canal Street, that splendid commercial artery of New Orleans ; when Badger with three cannon and two hundred men of a black regiment transformed the pedestal of Henry Clay's statue into a redoubt from which the mitrailleuse swept down the disarmed citizens ;—then, as Freedy can tell you, in the midst of the rioters we recognised a bandit of the Rocky Mountains, Red Ralph himself ! ”

“ Red Ralph ! ” exclaimed Valville, suddenly interrupting Woodman's narrative. “ I have heard that name before—and under terrible circumstances ! ”

Woodman imposed silence upon him by a kindly gesture.

“ With this ruffian there were also Sam Dorry, once banished from New Orleans for theft ; Phil Samster, the incendiary of the docks ; and, stranger still, for this is an element introduced by the scalawags which I have not hitherto mentioned to you, several Redskins of the Seminole race.

“ You may know that these Indians belong to the ferocious Creek tribe, and that they have been transported to the south of Florida.

“ These Indians despise the blacks and hate the whites. Incapable of work, they have become a sort of

mercenary troop taking pay from any adventurers who can give it them: such are the *bravi* of Louisiana. And when they have committed a crime, how can they be caught when they fly to the impenetrable and mysterious region called 'Everglad,' at the extreme south of the peninsula of Florida?

"Amongst these Seminoles was a well-known chief called Bloody Foot."

At this name Freedy looked at Woodman, and the two men exchanged a glance. But that was all.

Woodman continued :

"The men of Louisiana, daunted for a moment by this cannonade, which had broken out upon them without notice, without provocation, soon recovered their courage. Your father, Valville, and Doctor Freedy, sprang upon the barricade, at the head of the exasperated citizens. With his own hands Valville seized Red Ralph, and planting a revolver at his temples, he cried : 'Wretch! I could kill you ! but the gallows are needed for a robber like you !'

"Livid and grinding his teeth, Red Ralph responded :

"'Kill me, or I will kill you !'

"But Valville was generous. He could not bring himself to kill a conquered man. He placed the brigand in the hands of the authorities. That same evening Red Ralph was free.

"What else shall I tell you, Charles ? I cannot enter into the details of the combat that was then established between law and usurpation. In spite of the energy exhibited by your father and all other honest men, the

elections took place beneath a reign of terror. The Conservatives, for so we called ourselves, elected by their townsmen, were violently expelled from their seats. It was a continual strife between right and might, until the Government at Washington, opening its eyes at last, re-established some shadow of authority.

"But a terrible blow was aimed at the prosperity of Louisiana. The State is crushed by taxes and debts. The negroes are demoralised. The principal cities are impoverished. The public debt amounts to twenty-two million dollars! The public funds are diminished by thirty per cent.

"Governor Warmouth, weak and irresolute, leaves complete liberty of action to the intrigues of the black party. The metropolitan police are in this party's hands. 'Scalawags' and 'carpet-baggers' occupy all the seats of the legislature. Intelligent and industrious negroes keep in the background, but rascals have the power. And without partiality, negro criminals are much worse than white ones, because they unite to their bad instincts both ignorance and a sort of savagery, stimulated by persons who have something to gain by any kind of public excitement. We see around us open vice and organised robbery. Everything leads us to dread new and terrible complications. The adventurers are on the alert. Their vengeance on the chiefs of the resistance of 1874 is carried out almost in broad daylight. Burning plantations, and assassinated proprietors: a reign of terror extending over the entire country!

"Your father, my poor Charles, had long been one of

the intended victims. You know the rest. One dark night the robbers entered the plantation. Sambo does not doubt but that there were traitors in the place. Surprised in his sleep, your father still sold his life dearly. But a bullet laid him low; your two sisters ran to his help. What passed then, Lucile even cannot tell; surrounded by the flames, separated from her sister, she fell; and most horrible pain was inflicted upon her, for one of the assassins attempted to scalp her!"

"Horrible!" cried Charles. "I will have the ruffians' lives."

"She cannot tell why the crime was not fulfilled to the end, or how she found herself fainting on the edge of one of the streams that surround the house. She was rescued next morning. The steward of the plantation gave me all necessary information, and I flew to New Orleans, where I demanded the assistance of the police. Ah, my friend, I understood then how deep was the hatred which pursued us! My cries of anger were scarcely heeded. A formal inquiry was begun, and has naturally tended to no result. That is two months ago, Charles, and your father has not been avenged, neither has your sister reappeared. But you are here, and with Freedy's help, with your courage and my energy, which I put at your service, I swear that we will yet lay our hands upon the bandits, and dearly shall they expiate their cowardice and their crime."

Valville remained motionless. He had covered his face with his hands. Freedy and Woodman alike respected his silence.

But at last, upon a sign from Freedy, Woodman continued.

"Now, my dear boy, the time is come to take some decided measures. You will understand that I have not remained inactive. It was needful, above all, in order that our researches should not be utterly useless, to obtain the concurrence of a trustworthy man, of tried ability, who would consent to devote himself entirely to the success of our enterprise."

"And this man?" asked Charles, raising his head.

"I have found him," said Woodman. "And besides, his name is almost historical in the United States. It was he who pursued and discovered the assassin of President Lincoln; it was he who—after the great robbery of the Chicago bank of nearly a million dollars—got scent of the thieves, and delivered them up to justice. Finally, and this is the chief reason why his aid will be so precious to us, Ned Bark, for that is his name, has long lived in Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, and Florida. He knows the tricks of the scalawags as well as those of the Redskins."

"A valuable auxiliary," said Freedy. "I am personally acquainted with Ned Bark, and I am sure no one better could be found to guide us in the pursuit of the assassins."

"Now, Charles," said Woodman, "listen to me. I have taken all the necessary measures to protect the interests of the Battle Field Plantation as much as possible."

Charles made a sign of protest. What did he care for the plantation or its revenues?

"You do not understand me, my lad. Of course I know that just now all material considerations are nothing to you. But, for one thing, the plantation supports a number of black and white persons who have shown unfailing devotion to your father, and whom it is our duty not to leave without resources; also, remember, Charles, that you are not alone, and that now you are the head of the family. The estate belongs in part to your sisters, whose interests you must protect."

"You are right," said Charles. "But alas! of my two sisters one has disappeared. Shall we ever see again?"

"I hope so."

"What reason have you for your hope?"

"Lucile herself will tell you."

So saying, Woodman rose, and drawing aside the branches of the magnolias, he said:

"Look there."

At some little distance from them, beneath a magnificent cactus, whose thorny branches rose high into the air, they saw Lucile. Her forehead was hidden by a large straw hat; and she walked very slowly, with her eyes fixed upon a notebook in her hand. Beside her a greyhound ran gleefully towards a tame heron, which turned its long bill disdainfully to the graceful animal.

"Go and join your sister," said Woodman. "Freedy and I have many things to talk about; and as soon as Ned Bark, whom we expect, arrives, we will tell you."

Charles pressed his friends' hands, and approached

the young girl. She did not hear his footstep, for she was absorbed in her book.

When Charles was almost at her side, he called her softly by her name.

The girl started; then, recognising her brother, she held out her arms to him.

Lucile Valville was indeed a lovely girl. Her long chestnut hair fell over her shoulders; her refined features were moulded with exquisite delicacy. As she raised her head, her forehead could be seen, covered by the linen bandage which hid her wound and gave a strange expression to her gentle countenance.

The brother and sister conversed long together. They had many things to say; many sad reminiscences to interchange. Charles could never weary of asking questions, for his grief was augmented by the thought that he had not seen his father for so many years.

"Oh, he often spoke of you," said Lucile, "for, I may tell you now, you were his dearest. He longed for the time when you would return and settle in Louisiana—but when your last letter reached him"

Charles coloured and looked down, for the letter which Lucile mentioned was the one in which he had informed his father of his engagement to Alice Lodier.

"Yes?" he said hesitatingly.

"His plans seemed all at once to change," said Lucile.

"What do you mean?"

"Long before that, our dear father had talked of

realising his property and going to live in France. I think he then decided upon doing so."

"And my marriage—what did he say about it?"

"Did you ever doubt his consent?" said Lucile, softly.

"Ah, my dear father! Why was I not there to fight or to die with him?"

"He said, 'My Charles is an honest young man, and will have chosen one worthy of himself.' And then . . ." here it was Lucile's turn to hesitate, "someone else warmly pleaded your cause. . . ."

"Freedy, of course?"

"Yes, Doctor Freedy himself. Father kept him for some days at the plantation. And they talked a great deal about your future—oh, about your future and about yourself."

Charles looked at her attentively. Lucile was as pale as if all her blood had receded from her cheeks to her inmost heart. A new idea flashed across the young man's mind; an idea that contained both joy and hope.

Suddenly Lucile broke the silence.

"But Jeanne! Jeanne! let us speak of my poor sister."

"Yes, Mr. Woodman said that perhaps you would have something to tell me."

"Mr. Woodman has spoken the truth. Perhaps the trace of her that I have discovered is very vague, but we ought to neglect nothing. Listen."

They sat down together upon a bench.

"You know that Jeanne is of an energetic disposition. She loves violent exercise, riding, swimming, shooting. Father used to call her Charles the Second—his second Charles. But at the same time she is so kind, so generous. She always loved me, and took care of me as if I were a little child. Do you remember that one day she saved me from a horrible alligator? I was walking thoughtlessly on the river-bank, when one of these terrible creatures suddenly rushed towards me. I was lost! I was frozen with terror, and did not even try to fly; when a gun was fired, and the animal uttered a hoarse cry. It was my dearest Jeanne who killed the monster."

"No, I had not forgotten it," answered Charles.

"If I recal it to your mind, it is to give you confidence in her. Yes, my sister has been snatched from us; she has fallen into the hands of ruffians. But I say to you that Jeanne is brave, and while her life remains she will struggle; and I am sure she will escape."

"But if she was struck down like you?"

"I am sure that they have not killed her. At the moment when I was knocked down by a man whose face I could not see, at the moment when the scalping-knife had touched my head, I heard one word; one only, but I have not forgotten it! A man's stern voice cried 'Back!' and the hand upon my throat relaxed its hold. I had lost consciousness, but I was not dead. I am sure that the man who saved my life would not allow my sister to be killed; and if you still doubt—well, brother, I can give you a proof. . . ."

"A proof?"

"Yes, I am certain that if I was spared it was on my sister's account; he who carried her off would not approach her with his hands red with my blood. . . ."

"Why such generosity? Were not these men vile assassins?"

"I told you that I would prove my words. Here is the proof."

And she showed him the note-book that she had been reading.

"What is that?"

"You know that many American ladies are in the habit of keeping a journal in which they write down their thoughts and the events, more or less important, of their daily life. This book contains Jeanne's journal; and if you read it carefully, you may perhaps find in it more information than even I have done. But, for the present, look at these lines and tell me what you think of them."

Charles took the book. He opened it with a feeling of profound emotion.

The writing was firm and clear, and seemed to betoken a character full of energy and courage.

Lucile pointed to one paragraph. Charles read :

"To-day, a singular adventure happened to me. At the end of the plantation, near the foot of the waterfall beside which I am so fond of sitting, a man suddenly started up before me and said roughly, 'I am your father's enemy. But I love you. Consent to follow me and you will save your father.' I thought a madman was speaking

to me. I shrugged my shoulders and retreated towards the farm-buildings. He followed me for some time and added, ‘Take care! Red’—here he said some name which I could not catch: Red somebody—‘loves you and hates your father!’ I came in and closed the gate behind me.”

A little further on, the young girl had made another entry.

“That man has not reappeared, so I will not mention him to my father. Why should I disquiet him unnecessarily?”

Further still :

“I have found a note in my room ; from the stranger, no doubt. Still the same words : ‘I love you.’ I have burnt it. I think that I really must warn my father.”

Then came these concluding lines, dated the very evening before the crime itself.

“I have again seen that man, but he did not speak to me. He pointed to my father’s house with a menacing gesture. Who can he be? I feel very anxious. Can it be true that some danger threatens my father’s house and all those whom I love? Oh! if Charles were only here. Certainly to-morrow I will speak to my father.”

“But that ‘to-morrow’ never came,” Lucile murmured. “It was on that very night that the attack took place.”

“And the man whose name Jeanne did not hear distinctly,” said Charles ; “I cannot doubt—I know who he is; give me the book, Lucile. Yes, you are right. The man who has carried her off loves her with

a savage love ; he did not wish for your death, but he killed our father, and he must pay for his crime with his life."

At this moment Woodman was heard calling Charles.
"I must leave you, dear sister. Need I commend Madame Longpré and her niece to your tenderest care ? "

"Do I not love any one who loves you ? " said Lucile.
Charles slipped his sister's note-book into his pocket, and advanced to the spot from which Mr. Woodman had called to him.

At the same time a little, dry, wiry-looking man was seen crossing the lawn with rapid steps.

It was Ned Bark, the American detective.

CHAPTER V.

THE DETECTIVE.

MUCH has been said, and much written, about detectives: fiction has taken possession of them, and, to speak the truth, has created a somewhat fanciful type of the class. Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin and Gaboriau's Lecoq are such typical figures, which have undergone a hundred metamorphoses and are yet evermore the same. Transported to any country in the world, and disguised in any possible costume, they are everywhere identical; the Dupin or the Lecoq whom we have known so long and so well.

The American detective deserves a special place in this gallery of portraits. Some detectives have been represented as consumed by a passion for the welfare of others: all of them, by a desire for glory. But the American detective works simply and solely for money.

Besides, what different kinds of work they have to do! What are the qualities necessary to European detectives? Plenty of tact, more or less of the power of intuition, skill, and perseverance, without which nothing is possible. They keep still, they think, and they compare:

then at the precise moment they put their finger down on the right point and say : "The truth is here."

The American detective is a veritable soldier, constantly on horseback, in a railway carriage, on a steam-boat ; from Canada to Texas, from San Francisco to Philadelphia. He is the knight-errant of justice, the Ahasuerus of punishment. He does not content himself with receiving reports, and quietly playing the part of a man, who is solving peaceful riddles at his desk. The American detective gives himself to the service ; fights, travels, fires his gun in answer to a pistol-shot, and risks his scalp in the Rocky Mountains and his health in the Mississippi swamps. He has probably neither pen nor paper about him, nor any writing materials at all ; but he has powder and bullets, and a knife with a blade a foot long. He threatens and is threatened, hunts and is hunted.

For instance, Fred Hall, one of Ned Bark's colleagues, was told one day that three dangerous robbers had escaped from the Houston prison, and that they had most likely gone in the direction of the Red River. He jumped on his horse, found the three men in a wild and desolate region, killed one of them, disarmed the next, and forced him, by means of a revolver at his temples, to act as a guard over the third.

But if he is to put all his faculties into his work and stake his life upon the game, the affair must be worth a good many dollars to him. He is an adventurer of a special kind, who puts into his contest for good an activity, a courage, a dash, which others too often employ

only for evil. Nevertheless he wants to make his fortune, and one day to retire to his farm, there to enjoy the fruits of his works. Like Hercules, he has accomplished his twelve labours at the command of a king ; that king, the almighty dollar !

At the same time he is as honest as most other men ; for his probity forms part of the resources which he puts at the disposal of those who employ him ; he shrinks from no portion of the work which he undertakes, and forfeits the reward in case of failure : in fact, he works by contract.

He possesses therefore less imaginary grandeur, he is less mysterious and less stagey than the detectives of romance. But when any European detective has done his fifty miles a day on a horse bareback, when he has cheerfully sustained a three days' siege behind a block of stone, when he has seen himself twenty times at the very point of death, then he will be equal to an American detective.

Which is to say, he will then equal Ned Bark.

For it is his portrait simply that we have drawn.

He was short, muscular, thick-set, well-built either for fight or flight. Unattractive at first sight, he had the thin face of a true Yankee, with its inevitable tuft of hair like a goat's beard on the chin. He was one-eyed, having partially lost his sight in some past affray. The one remaining eye had retired beneath the bony ridges of his brow, as if it wanted to preserve itself from a like accident behind a fortification. But from the depth of this redoubt it flashed forth—to continue the

comparison—with the keen brightness of some deadly weapon.

When this curious-looking individual entered the room where Woodman, Freedy, and Valville awaited him, the three men rose, and the planter gave him his hand. Ned Bark was not at all unmindful of such tokens of respect.

"Ned," said Woodman, "let me introduce Mr. Charles Valville to you, the son of the Battle Field planter, and brother of the young lady who has been carried off."

Ned looked at him, or rather fixed his eye upon Valville's face, as if he wished by one such gaze to measure the worth of a man who had his father to avenge.

Probably he was satisfied with the result of his examination, for he said, bowing—

"Your father was a brave man, sir. I guess you are worthy of him."

"I will answer for him," said Woodman, "and so will Freedy."

"Certainly," said Freedy; "and if Ned Bark has formed any such plan of action as we expect from him, he may feel sure of being well seconded."

"One moment," said Woodman, who knew the detective's habits; "let us first settle the terms of remuneration."

"My whole fortune!" exclaimed Charles with youthful ardour.

Ned Bark smiled.

"Let us have figures," he said.

"Fix your own terms," Charles began again.

But Woodman interrupted him. "Ned Bark fixes nothing. He bargains, which is much better. My dear Valville, will you let me manage this affair?"

Charles, whose French notions were somewhat shocked by this method of acting, bowed his head without reply.

Woodman continued—

"Look here, Ned Bark. Cash on account, a thousand dollars. As soon as we are on the track of the murderers, a thousand dollars. As soon as we are on the young lady's track, a thousand dollars. If successful, five thousand dollars. Will these terms suit you?"

"First-rate," said Ned Bark coolly. "One thing more. If I am killed before completion of the work, two thousand dollars to be sent to Mrs. Bark, at Chicago."

"Agreed! We will sign an agreement to that effect."

It was a regular matter of business, and, as usual, Ned Bark expected to be paid for the risk he ran.

Woodman rapidly prepared a form, which Valville signed with a sort of impatience. Not that the price of the promised help seemed too high to him, but this manner of bargaining for it displeased him. Youth is sometimes over-nice.

"Now," said Woodman, addressing himself to Ned Bark, "here are the thousand dollars in advance. Sign a receipt, if you please."

The receipt was drawn up and signed with the same coolness.

But when Ned Bark had written his name in big letters, he turned to Woodman.

"Prepare another receipt," he said.

"Eh?"

"Certainly: read the terms of the agreement."

"But nothing, sir," exclaimed Valville, ill concealing his suppressed anger, "nothing is due to you beforehand!"

"Certainly not—but . . ."

"While Mr. Woodman is so good as to write the second receipt, I will prove that you owe me a thousand dollars."

Valville uttered a cry of surprise, and regarded Ned Bark with a much more friendly eye.

"Then I'll write," said Woodman.

"And I will speak," said the detective.

He fumbled in his pocket and produced a note-book, which he opened.

"I have ascertained," he said, "that Red Ralph was at New Orleans on the night before the crime. In the evening he was seen at a gambling-house in Montgomery Street, and there he held a long conversation with Phil Samster, the incendiary."

"Then those two ruffians must be accomplices," said Freedy.

"But who can tell," Valville interrupted quickly, "that this conversation had anything to do with the crime?"

"At night," continued the detective, "Red Ralph and Samster went to a certain Brown of Shell Road. This Brown is an agent and receiver of horses from the horse-stealers, who ply their trade in Texas, Alabama,

and Louisiana. There Red Ralph bought six horses, good runners, strong, and able to support great fatigue . . .”

“This is all very interesting,” said Woodman. “But, without inquiring where you obtained all this information, I agree with Valville in asking if you have nothing more conclusive to tell us?”

Ned, who seemed to consider these objections very natural, drew out of his note-book a paper which he handed to Woodman.

“What is this?” said the planter. “A saddler's invoice?”

“Yes, I found it in the grass near Valville's house. See what it contains.”

“Sold to—a blank for the name—, a lady's saddle with its accessories.”

“And on the back?”

“Sent from B. S. R. That is, Brown, Shell Road.”

“Evidently. Another thing. I am almost certain that the guilty persons are five in number. The sixth horse was destined for the use of the young lady who was carried off. We know two of them, Red Ralph the robber, and his friend, Phil Samster. Three others remain to be discovered, who are, perhaps, only inferiors, common thieves, tools belonging to Red Ralph. But look at this,” said Ned, who felt in his pocket a second time, and produced a scrap of brown stuff.

Freedy uttered an exclamation.

“Ned Bark, that is a bit of Indian cloth.”

“As you say. Again, the place where I found it will,

if necessary, remove any doubt that may still subsist in your mind. Upon the edge of the bayou where Miss Lucile was dragged by the bandit who meant to scalp her, there are a great many sharp and prickly briars which grow low, close to the ground. One of these briars tore off a rag of the clothing, which, according to Indian fashion, covered the man from head to foot. So we have to do with an Indian. Who is he? I am just about to tell you; and that will also instruct us as to the direction in which we must prosecute our researches."

Valville was now quite reconciled to the manners of the detective; he regretted the impatient words which had escaped him, and with a burst of that frankness which is so delightful in the young, he held out his hand and said—

"Pardon me, sir . . ."

"What for?" interrupted the detective, with well-acted surprise. Then he added, with a somewhat ironical smile, "I am earning my money, that is all. I think I can prove to you, however, that I am no soothsayer, and that I have gained my information in simple, straightforward ways. The Indian was no other than a Seminole, known by the name of Bloody Foot."

"I know him!" exclaimed Freedy.

"Then you know as I do that he owes his name to a horrible wound which deprived him of all the fore part of his right foot; a blow from an axe carried off all the toes, and mutilated it to that degree that he wears a sort of apparatus made of bound and twisted reeds, like

a great horse's hoof; still, he is as agile and as ready to walk and run as ever. Well, it was Bloody Foot who set fire to the house; for, under the charred fragments of the house, protected by small beams which crossed and recrossed each other, and were preserved as if by a miracle, I found, after the clearance of rubbish which has been going on for the last few days, undeniable traces of Bloody Foot—prints of the mocassin and the hoof. You see," Ned Bark added, turning to Valville, "our science consists merely of memory, attention, and—luck."

"Then," said Valville, "three of the criminals are known. As for the other two?"

"So far I have not found any trace of them. But I repeat, I believe they are robbers in Red Ralph's pay. There only remains now to tell you in what direction we ought to follow our pursuit."

"Take your thousand dollars," said Woodman.

"Not yet," said Ned Bark, winking slightly towards Valville. "I should tell you first why this evening we must set off for Jacksonville . . ."

"In Florida?" cried Freedy.

"Exactly," replied Ned Bark. "Only what I have to say is a delicate matter—in fact, it is almost a professional secret—and I must ask you to give your word that you will tell nobody what I am about to impart to you."

"You may depend upon us," said Freedy. "We know you too well to refuse the promise that you desire from us."

"Especially as the least imprudence might be very hurtful. You shall judge of that. Three days ago, after having considered the matter very seriously, certain reasons led me to believe that the robbers now infesting New Orleans had accomplices among the metropolitan police."

"A sad effect of our political dissensions," said Woodman, shaking his head.

"I do not say," Ned Bark continued, "that there are murderers among them; but what I am certain of is, that all these adventurers—the scalawags—have established close relations with the lowest members of the police force, and that these men help them, either by giving them hints, or warning them of the dangers that they run. Three days ago I went to the metropolitan board, at the time when all the policemen were gathered in the common room, awaiting their chief's orders. Many recognised me, and although they received me politely, their manner was exceedingly constrained. We were not on the same side, but we entered into conversation together. We had talked of many different subjects, when at last, as if by chance, I dropped these words: 'The crime of Battle Field will not long go unpunished.' A general sensation of curiosity seemed to be felt, and in answer to repeated questions I replied, 'Mr. Valville's son and Doctor Freedy have just arrived in America, and are setting to work to discover the assassins.' Then I spoke of other things. I had said quite enough."

"Especially as we were very nearly assassinated in the Blue Hills!" exclaimed Freedy.

"An attempt which cost a certain bandit his life, I know. But, you see, gentlemen," and here Ned Bark's voice assumed a singular solemnity, "we must all risk our lives in the work upon which we are entering: do not doubt that for a single moment."

"We are ready," said Valville in a firm tone.

"The remark was made," continued Ned Bark, "with the intention of forcing Red Ralph's accomplices, should any of them be present, as I supposed, to compromise themselves; and I must say that my hope was not disappointed. Scarcely had I said the words, when I noticed at the end of the room a negro, attached to one of the brigades, slip away through a door behind him. Was this chance? or premeditation? I went out and saw the man running in the direction of the St. Louis Hotel. There I saw him enter a telegraph office. I entered it by another door at the same moment, and my negro would have been very much surprised if he had known that I was writing down in my note-book the telegram that he dictated to the clerk, for it is needless to state that he could not write."

"And this telegram?"

"Very short, but very clear," said Ned Bark.

And he read out from his note-book—

"'Blue. Pilatka. Mind. F. V. here. 267.' Which means—'Blue at Pilatka. Take care. Freedy and Valville are here. Signed 267,'—the number of the policeman.

"Now," continued Ned Bark, "it is not necessary to be a great magician to understand that Blue is only a very simple blind for the word Red. As for Pilatka, you all know that it is a small town in Florida on the St. John's River. From which we draw the inference . . ."

"That Red Ralph is at Pilatka," exclaimed Valville.

"Or that his usual quarters are there; not far from the Seminole territory, in 'Everglad.'"

Certainly Ned Bark had well earned the thousand dollars that he claimed, and which he made no further difficulty about accepting. Valville, full of admiration, wished that he could also claim at once the thousand dollars which would be due to him as soon as they were on Jeanne's track. But the detective knew nothing more.

"We cannot tell," he said, "what was the motive of the robbers in carrying off the young lady. I have every reason to believe that they have not conveyed her to the lonely place in which they seem now to be concealing themselves—with what design, I know not. Have patience: set to work, and our good cause will do the rest."

The plan of campaign was quickly decided upon.

Freedy and Valville were to set off with Ned Bark. Mr. Woodman was to stay at the plantation, in order to protect Lucile and the strangers.

For Ned Bark, who had supreme control of the expedition, flatly refused to allow Alice to join in it. In vain the girl begged Valville to let her go with him, say-

ing that neither her strength nor her courage would fail her. In vain did Madame Longpré, with her iron will, declare that she had not come to Louisiana in order to remain inactive. Ned Bark was inflexible.

He could not foresee that in spite of all his prudence, Alice would soon be involved in the tragical adventures which were to follow.

The same evening the three men, well armed, set off for Jacksonville, intending to follow up the stream of the St. John's River, if it were necessary, even to the very heart of those strange and luxuriant solitudes which are known as 'Everglad.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE DANGERS OF MIMICRY.

ABOUT a week before the scene which we have just described, in which our friends decided upon the opening of their campaign, another scene, of a totally different character, was enacted at the railway station of Savannah, upon the Georgian coast.

A train from Charleston, in South Carolina, was steaming at full speed into the immense station ; and from the cars a crowd of men, black, white, and brown, of all types and all origins, leaped out upon the platform ; some of them hailing the negro-porters, and directing their steps to the interior of the town ; others inquiring the time of departure of the next boat for Jacksonville.

One of the first party, a little man, with a little cap, a little pea-jacket, and a little leathern bag attached to a shoulder-strap, jumped out and ran, as fast as his little legs would carry him, to the luggage van.

He muttered between his teeth—

“At last ! here we are ! Saperlipopette ! Not at all too soon !”

He planted himself before one of the officials, a man

with a goat's beard and a green cap, and held out a ticket.

"Yes!" he continued, in a mixture of French and English; "trente-trois—thirty-three—malles—trunks : à moi, comprenez?"

The clerk, quite unmoved, walked to the end of the van and pointed to a great heap of cases, trunks, and hat-boxes—enough to furnish a trunkmaker's shop.

"Yes!" said the other. "Mais—homme—men—pour porter—to carry. . . ."

Then he began to talk in a very loud voice—

"P-o-u-r, pour, p-o-r-t-e-r, porter!—Yes! Hein! not understand?" he went on in French. "Are they idiots, then?—Black bread, va!"

This last expression had reference to the complexion of the official, who was a decided mulatto. He must most certainly have possessed the gift of tongues, for he turned to a group of negroes who were hanging about the station awaiting orders, and uttered a low whistle.

Five negroes advanced, jostling the little traveller; they received the ticket from the clerk's hands, and fell upon the pile of trunks.

"Sapristi! take care!" cried the little man in despair. "Aie—my hats—my eighteen hats! Hi! you madman, don't shake about my shirts like that—best Longueville patterns! You blackamoors! Heaven! my cravats!"

For a negro had just slipped and fallen all his length over a great box which was crushed beneath his weight.

But they lifted up the boxes and carried them off, rolling their eyes and showing their brilliant white teeth

as they went. Hither and thither they ran, everywhere pursued by the stranger, who clucked after them like a hen after her chickens.

To the first five negroes ten others had been added ; and the mighty heap was levelled, the fortress of trunks was scattered abroad upon the shoulders of these fifteen blacks, who now quitted the station with many noddings of the head and calls to the owner of the luggage to follow them.

“Wait ! sapristi ! oh, the rascals ! They remind me of Dupuis in the play of the Charbonniers !”

Then, plucking up his courage, he stood firmly upon his two little legs, which were very like sticks, supporting an extraordinary pair of trousers that widened from the knee downwards after the fashion of an elephant’s foot.

“You, good negro,” he said, addressing himself to a black giant who stared at him in utter bewilderment ; “you, good negro, take me good hotel.”

The negro’s mouth widened almost to his ears, but he did not move.

“Brute !” shouted the traveller. “Must I make you go on with a kick—à coups de bottes ?”

“Bottes ! Bottes !” repeated the negroes, as if struck with a new idea.

And all of them resumed their march in single file, while the word ‘bottes’ resounded from one end to the other of the little procession.

The traveller ran after them, stumbling over ropes and wildly seizing hold of tarred bales, slipping, jumping up again, and shouting—

"Idiots ! Fools !—Hôtel! hôtel!"

"Bottes ! Bottes !" repeated the echo.

And the thirty-three trunks, cases, and hat-boxes were carried down some steps, pushed over gangways, and finally piled up in the hold of a steamboat.

The little man meanwhile repeated his cry, ' Hôtel ! ' The only answer he received was the one word—' Bottes ! '

The tall negro returned and held out his hand ; the little man protested. The negro tapped the leathern bag ; the little man shouted. The negro opened the bag and put in his hand ; the little man flew into a furious passion. The negro took out a handful of dollars, counted them, took five, and returned the rest to the bag. Then, scarcely knowing how, taken off his feet and passed from hand to hand like a parcel, the traveller found himself on board the steamer : the bell rang, the engines worked, a stentorian voice shouted—" Go ahead !" and Eusèbe Lodier, exhausted and almost stupefied, sank down upon a heap of ropes, crying—

" Arrêtez ! — stop ! — moi — New Orleans ! Là ! — Stop ! "

A man attired in a sort of jersey, his trousers tucked into his boots, and a carpet-bag in his hand, approached him, and said :

" Monsieur is French ? "

He spoke in French. A fellow-countryman ! Eusèbe threw himself upon him, and shaking him by the buttons of his jersey, launched forth volubly—

" Ah, monsieur, listen ! I won't have these tricks

played upon me ! Tell the engineer to stop ! tell them to land me ! I am going to New Orleans !”

The other smiled a little drily, and said—

“ New Orleans ! You are a good way off, sir.”

“ A good way off ! Nonsense ! You want to take me in, too, do you ? very fine ! I have come from New York. I was to go to Charleston, and then by train to New Orleans. I was at Charleston yesterday evening, so . . .”

“ Which Charleston do you mean ?”

“ Which ? No, no, my man ; you would like to puzzle Coco, wouldn’t you ? but this is not play, I tell you !”

“ There’s Charleston in Virginia, and Charleston in Carolina.”

“ Virginia ! Carolina ! Nothing but women’s names ! What’s that to do with it ?”

“ Merely, sir, that the town you have just left is Savannah, near Charleston in Carolina ; and that you have made a mistake, for your way lay through Charleston in Virginia.”

Eusèbe opened his eyes in great dismay.

“ But never mind !” said the man with the carpet-bag ; “ you are a stranger, so I will direct you.”

At this point Eusèbe was attacked by sea-sickness, and retreated to the side of the boat, where, in the midst of his agonies, he asked himself repeatedly why the negroes of whom he had inquired the way to an hotel had insisted upon bringing him to a steamer.

It was a question which might easily have been answered.

What connection could possibly exist between boots and a steamer?

The fact was, that Eusèbe had a mania for imitating the actors of the Parisian theatres. In one of Offenbach's best-known comic operas, the actor Brasseur, in the person of a German shoemaker, bends over the feet of another actor on the stage, and cries out, with a strong German accent—

“Fus abez ça tes bôtes ! c'est bas tes bôtes ! Otez ça !” (You call those things boots ! they are not boots ! Take them off !)

Accordingly Eusèbe had fallen into the habit of never pronouncing the word ‘bottes’ with its proper short o, but as ‘bôôôtes,’ with at least three circumflex accents. As he knew scarcely a word of English, the negroes whom he abused could not understand his commands at all until the monosyllable ‘bôttès’ fell upon their ears. Then indeed they took it for the English word ‘boat,’ and fully believed that the traveller was ordering them to take the luggage to the steamer. We know the rest.

As for Eusèbe, who had spoken English without knowing it, he did not comprehend for many a long day the origin of his misadventure.

For the moment he was delighted. Fancy finding some one to talk to !

Ever since his arrival in America he had been hurled from one person or place to another, like a projectile from a cannon's mouth. Therefore the man who had just presented himself to him, in spite of a somewhat

unprepossessing appearance, which might have recalled to a regular theatre-goer the melodramatic villains of the stage, was placed at once by Eusèbe in the category of his most intimate friends.

Overjoyed at being able to speak and be understood, he made no secret of his history.

"How splendid this is!" he cried. "Here am I Eusèbe Lodier, the flower of the Pois-Chiches Club, hundreds of miles from the Passage Jouffroy—no, it is too awful! and you will perhaps ask me why!"

The other remained silent and motionless.

"I've nothing to hide! not I! I swear it! Here is the whole story. I have a sister—a brave creature—in love with a Louisiana man—a good fellow, though, between ourselves; he goes in for tragedy a little too much, but not a bad fellow, by any means. It seems that down there at New Orleans they have been killing all his family! So off he goes 'for vengeance,' and my sister has gone with him. Oh, quite properly, you know: old Mother Longpré has gone too: rather a queer old soul, but not bad either! and here am I after them. 'One minute,' I said to myself, 'You shan't leave Coco behind like that!' Coco—that's me. So I looked in at my tailor's—Blancgonnet: you know him? Hein! such taste in trousers: I'll give you his address. From there I ran off to my shoemaker's, my hatter's, my tailor's! What frightful haste I had to make—and then the packing! To cut it short, I was at Havre in three days. I went to the office and asked for a first-class ticket to America. Eight hundred francs! Sap-

risti ! Luckily it was all the same to me. ‘ I had taken a round sum,’ as Hyacinthe says in the play of *Tricoche et Cacolet*; and off I went ! How ill I was on the way ! but it was over in no time, you know. Well, at New York I booked to New Orleans. They set me down at Charleston : you know the rest. But enough of this chatter. You have a good sort of face ! And you are going to take charge of me, are you ? Well, between ourselves, now, tell me, like a friend, if I am really very far from Louisiana ? ”

The man had listened without saying a word. Only at the point where mention was made of a round sum of money, his eyes had glistened singularly, and rested with a certain sort of complacency upon the well-filled bag which the young exquisite carried at his belt.

“ So you want to go to Louisiana ? ” he asked, in his guttural tones.

“ I said so : I wait for your answer ! ”

“ Well, nothing is more simple.”

“ Ah ! so much the better. Your words are like balm to my fainting spirits. How long will it take ? ”

“ Three days.”

“ Hum ! three days’ more knocking about. And what way must I take ? ”

“ You trust me ? ”

“ Of course I do ! If it is all the same to you, let us talk while we are lunching ; I feel a sort of aching void within—I suppose one can find something to peck at in this little ferry-boat ? ”

“ Certainly.”

"And you won't refuse to accept a feed?"

"Eh?"

"To lunch with me, then. It's very odd; you seem to speak French very well, but the idioms bother you sometimes!"

"I accept your invitation," said the other.

And the two descended together to the cabin.

Eusèbe felt his serenity return. He placed himself proudly at the table, and called out 'Waiter!' with the voice of a stentor.

Naturally nobody took any notice of him. But his very kind and obliging companion made a sign to the steward, who immediately approached them. He was a negro of the darkest shade, and his attentions effectually restored Eusèbe to good-humour.

"What is the menu?" said he to his companion. "Have they any game? I should very much like a bit of widgeon, or something more elaborate; a veal sweetbread with potato chips, green peas, a coffee ice or an almond pudding; but you can arrange all that."

Whereupon the other requested the steward to bring up the boat's usual supplies of roast beef, roast mutton, boiled ham, and other similar edibles of a light and refreshing nature.

When Eusèbe saw these Pelions of joints on which whole Ossas of potatoes were waiting to be piled, he uttered a cry of terror.

"Have I to eat that?" he asked in an affrighted tone.

"Yes! Unless you want to die of hunger," replied

the other, as he vigorously attacked one of the nutritious pyramids.

Well, Eusèbe had a good appetite. He heaved a sigh and resigned himself to his fate, though not without a protest against the cooking and the quality of the food.

"If the men at my club could see me devouring this!" he moaned.

At first he was much taken aback by the kind of liquor he was expected to drink. Under the name of wine they served him some highly-flavoured beverage which burnt his throat. Nevertheless, his friend added red pepper to his own glass.

Eusèbe, who wanted to be thought a man of the world, and to uphold the honour of his country, swallowed his beverage manfully, with his eyes starting and his mouth on fire. He would have given five pounds for a glass of water! but how could he ask for it? And at his third glass he had lost all sensation, both in palate and in tongue.

"Now, then," said the other; "I am quite at your disposal, and I will point out to you clearly and plainly what route you ought to take. Don't alter your course a hand's breadth from it."

"No danger," murmured Eusèbe, who could hardly speak.

"To-morrow morning the steamer will stop at Fernandina . . ."

"Another girl's name: very pretty."

"Fernandina; but wait, I will write down the names for you; that will be most convenient."

" You are quite a father to me ! "

" Drink away ; you are not taking anything ! "

Eusèbe made a resigned grimace. The conversation had caused him to hope for a truce to the drinking. But there was no help for it.

" I said Fernandina," continued the other. " There you need not stop . . . "

" Ah, well ! go on, then."

" You will remain on board, and the steamer will take you on to Brunswick . . . "

" I knew a man of that name in Paris ! he was at all the rehearsals. But it can't be the same . . . "

" You will stop on board . . . "

" Always ? "

" You will pass Jacksonville ; you must not get off . . . "

" Well ? "

" Till you reach Picolata . . . "

" What a name to remember ! "

" There you must stop . . . "

" None too soon ! "

" You will get off, go to the hotel, and have a rest. You will have a charming and obliging host to wait upon you . . . "

" A paradise ! How glad I am that I met you ! You will tell me your name, will you not ? "

" I am called Captain Cotraw."

One should be able to give the hoarse tones of the man's voice in order to make the reader understand how Eusèbe responded,

" Captain Queue-de-Rat ! . . . exactly ! "

The other did not wince.

"Of the Military College of the United States : an intimate friend of General Grant : and, if I may say it, one of the heroes of the late war."

Having thus conferred brevet rank on himself, Captain Cotraw called for some more whisky, tossed off a glass of it, and continued—

"Here are all the names written down ; you can't make a mistake. At Picolata they will tell you the way to New Orleans. A little further on, keeping to the right . . ."

"Always to the right ! What a treasure of a man ! Ah ! Captain Queue-de-Rat, why don't you accompany me ?"

"I cannot," said the man, speaking mysteriously into Eusèbe's ear ; "on the President's service !"

"Oh ! Well, then . . ."

"Let us have a last glass, and finish our meal together."

"Willingly. But call for the bill, and I'll pay it."

The captain slightly bit his lip.

"If you like, I will save you that trouble."

"I scarcely liked to ask it of you," Eusèbe hastened to say. He was, in fact, beginning to suffer from violent headache.

He gave his leathern pouch to the captain.

That gentleman opened it dexterously, plunged his great hand down to the bottom, doubtless in order to ascertain precisely what Eusèbe meant by a good round sum, then delicately drew out a few dollars, called the

steward, and paid him. Then he restored the bag to its owner.

An hour afterwards Eusèbe was sleeping so heavily—thanks to the brandied wine and the whisky—that a whole troop of imps seemed to be dancing a saraband in his brain.

Next morning he awoke with half-blinded eyes and severed mouth.

“ My head aches terribly ! ” he said to himself.

But the captain was before him, with bright eyes and gleaming teeth which looked like knives freshly sharpened for the battle of another meal.

Luncheon began again ; roast beef, roast mutton, salt beef, salt mutton, wine and whisky.

If he had dared, Eusèbe would gladly have cried “ Hold, enough ! ” But he had not even the strength to do that, for his throat was in a raw and rasped condition, which prevented his uttering anything but inarticulate sounds, and the steamer rocked so violently that the effect upon him was anything but agreeable.

“ Jacksonville ! ”

The name resounded through the steamer. Eusèbe, curled up beneath a bench, between a barrel of tar and a cask of salt fish, did not care to move. Vaguely he remembered that he had been told to keep still.

Complete stupefaction had overpowered him. He had no other consciousness of his present condition than an overwhelming sensation of mingled sea-sickness and intoxication. How long this state of mind and body endured, it would have been impossible for him to say ; but at last a new cry resounded harshly in his ears—

"Picolata!"

"Chipolata! here it is!" squeaked Eusèbe, stumbling to his feet.

He fell into a sitting posture, rose again, tumbled against a sailor who thrust him back with an oath; but at last, he knew not how nor why, he found himself upon the gangway.

Here a sudden gleam of intelligence crossed his mind.

"Luggage! Luggage!" he cried. "Thirty-three boxes!"

Where were they? The first mate of the steamer knew a few words of French.

"Your ticket?" he said.

"Ticket? Ah! yes, true! in my pocket."

He looked for it.

At last he found the ticket, and placed it triumphantly in the mate's hands. The mate glanced at it rapidly and handed it to a sailor, who ran to the hold. In two minutes he returned with one packet, which he placed in Eusèbe's arms.

"Come, get off!" said the mate.

"Off? with what? with this thing?"

For the packet which Eusèbe irreverently called 'this thing' consisted of a few articles tied up in a plaid, over which were crossed an enormous gun and a stick as thick as the clubs used by the dandies in the time of the Directoire.

"That thing?" he repeated. "But I don't want that! I have thirty-three boxes. Thirty-three, do you hear?"

"Quite enough. Have you another ticket?"

"Ticket? . . . always tickets! . . . Have I been cheated?"

And with a sort of rage he searched his pockets again and again. Nothing! nothing!

"Captain Queue-de-Rat!" he cried. "Help! You have got my ticket! Thirty-three boxes!"

"Thirty-three boxes?" said the mate impatiently.
"We unloaded them . . ."

"Where? when? how?"

"At St. John's; see, here is the very ticket."

And they showed him—yes, they showed Eusèbe his ticket; his own ticket, on which the two figures, 33, stared him in the face as if they had been traced in characters of fire.

He wanted to argue, to protest; he called a hundred times for the valiant Captain Queue-de-Rat to come to his aid; but the captain seemed to have disappeared into the depths of some submarine abyss.

"Yes or no! are you going to land at Picolata?"

"Picolata! yes! . . . but . . . thirty-three cases!"

Pushed and jostled from side to side, the unfortunate Eusèbe found himself forced over the gangway, and gained the solid ground again with Captain Queue-de-Rat's luggage on his back.

He was at Picolata, in Florida.

And in the midst of his misery, which was profound, he had one consolation; and that was, that round his neck still hung the leathern wallet, still heavy, and therefore still well-filled.

CHAPTER VII.

A WANDERER.

THE author has too much confidence in his readers' intelligence to detain them in order to give any reasons for the disappearance of the excellent, amiable, and obliging Captain Queue-de-Rat.

The thirty-three cases were now upon their way by train to Jacksonville; and the moment was drawing near when, before the astonished eyes of his customers, the captain could display the admirable boots, the well-cut trousers, the hats of every kind, from the simple cap to the opera-hat, the many-coloured neckties, which constituted Eusèbe's most valued possessions !

And the bear-skin travelling-rug, the furred slippers, the silver dressing-case ; all these were to travel far and wide upon the arm of the audacious thief, who, in order to keep his movements more free, had not hesitated to sacrifice his own luggage to Eusèbe.

But where was Eusèbe—with his little bag ?

Once upon a time, Buckingham Smith, secretary to the American Embassy at Madrid, was obliged to send his wife alone to St. Augustine, in Florida.

"Good-bye," he said to her. "God bless you ! You

are beginning your journey very comfortably. You will be safe as far as Picolata ; but from there—Heaven help you !”

And what Picolata was ten or twenty years ago, Picolata is now : a sort of grimy, dirty quay, on worm-eaten wooden piles, where steamboats unlade their merchandise ; so much for the outside of the town. Within, everything is different ; for there is nothing to be seen at all. The sea-breeze blows in upon the traveller and chills him to the bone. Before him stands a shaky-looking sort of building of decaying wood, which serves alike for barn, mill, or anything else that may be wanted ; while the groundfloor is occupied by a grog-shop about ten feet square.

And nineteen times out of twenty the grog-shop is filled to overflowing by some dozen individuals of decidedly cut-throat appearance.

Such is the place where the excellent Captain Queue-de-Rat caused Eusèbe to land, in the belief that New Orleans was only a few steps further on—if you kept to the right.

Dismayed, unhappy, and feeling as if the earth were giving way beneath his feet, Eusèbe stood motionless on the pier. Some few suspicious-looking men came and hovered round him, like dogs that scent a meal. But it seemed as if their prey was not very tempting, for, with a mocking smile, they turned upon their heels and sought the grog-shop, where they resumed their interrupted game of ‘Seven up.’

Yes, utterly dismayed and overwhelmed was poor

Eusèbe ; and he might well have been so, even with less numerous misfortunes.

The fine ‘Cocodès,’ as he nicknamed himself, who, at Paris, never went a step except on horseback or in a carriage ; who knew nothing of life but what could be seen in the artificial atmosphere of the green-room or the boudoir ; who laughed at everything, and vowed that there was nothing serious in heaven or earth ; the fastidious diner-out, the most persevering dancer of the season, found himself, at four o’clock in the evening, exposed to a bitter wind, fifteen hundred leagues from France, with his little coat splashed with black mud, his forehead scarcely covered by a tiny cap, his legs shaking, and his whole form shivering from head to foot.

Certainly, as he would have said—if he had been able to speak—it was not at all strange ; oh no ! And yet he must come to some decision. To stay where he then found himself was impossible. If he did, he would soon freeze to death, being destitute of the warm skin which benevolent nature has conferred upon the black bear and the white.

Already an odd tingling at the nostrils told him that he had caught a terrible cold in the head. He sneezed.

This sneeze was both a revelation and a resurrection.

It shook and awoke him, and as he looked round, he observed a grog-shop, through the windows of which a faint red light was visible.

The instinct of self-preservation sometimes does wonders. Eusèbe stood erect, and mechanically settling

Captain Queue-de-Rat's bundle on his shoulders, and allowing the gun and the stick to swing against his legs as he moved onwards, he directed his steps towards the tavern.

He was not a coward at heart. He pushed the door open and entered.

It is right to say, however, that he had just remembered the round sum which he carried in his little bag. Supposing that he were not able to explain himself in words, he could at least produce some sound arguments in his own favour in the shape of coin.

The men raised their heads and looked at him.

He went straight to the counter, presided over by a big man with a bearded face; and seeing there a bottle upon which was inscribed in gold letters the single word Rum, he said shortly—

“A glass of rum.”

He knew so much English, as he had heard these words at an American buffet in Paris.

The man silently poured out a glass of rum. Eusèbe, who wanted above all to regain his courage, swallowed it at a draught. It burnt him, but the warmth thus afforded was not disagreeable, especially as he felt behind him the heat of an almost red-hot stove.

He reflected for a moment. He had nearly learnt the English pronunciation of the name New Orleans, and good Captain Cotraw had at least assisted him in this part of his education. Moreover, he knew the word ‘go.’ It was used on the racecourse.

Eusèbe submitted himself to a short linguistic exercise, and then said, with the audacity of a true Parisian—

“Go New Orleans.”

The men looked at him in astonishment. He repeated his words in a louder key, for, like many persons in a foreign country, he seemed to imagine that he was talking to deaf men :

“Go—New—Orleans.”

Then there was an explosion. The big man held his sides with his two great hands—about the size of shoulders of mutton—and burst into a loud shout of laughter, which was boisterously re-echoed on every side.

Eusèbe shouted again and again, “Niow-Orlianns !”

And as they began to persecute him with jokes of a somewhat doubtful character, which disgusted him all the more because he could not understand them, he had a sudden inspiration !

With an air of proud disdain, he raised his head, opened his bag, and, like a man who has never known fear, he placed upon the counter—a stone, which might have weighed perhaps about half a pound !

Horrible ! a stone—a real stone !

As the laughter was renewed to an alarming degree, he rummaged angrily in his bag.

One stone ! two stones ! three stones ! nothing but stones.

His round sum of money had been changed, not indeed into leaves, but into granite.

For a moment Eusèbe felt as if he had received a blow

on the head : a hundred sparks danced before his eyes. He had been robbed, shamefully, cruelly robbed ! he was ruined ; he had not a penny left, and he would look like a thief !

There is always some good in a man—especially when he is not worse than Eusèbe—and it was this last thought that hurt him most. The effect on him was so powerful that his memory returned, and he recollect ed that he had some change in his waistcoat pocket. The wretched Queue-de-Rat would probably have despised this trifle. Eusèbe was right ; and his fingers closed upon the few dimes which alone remained. He extracted one of them from his pocket, and threw it down in payment for the glass of rum that he had drunk.

Then, with a certain hauteur which, under the circumstances, was not without its heroism, he passed the laughers, opened the door, and left the house.

Night was closing in. A fine rain was falling, but Eusèbe did not notice it. He marched stiffly out into the wet fog, and walked straight on, he knew not whither ; himself, his gun, his stick, and the bundle gradually disappearing in the shades of evening.

He could not tell where he was going. But, still obedient to the mocking directions of Captain Queue-de-Rat, he bore instinctively to the right.

Not that he believed any longer that New Orleans was near.

He believed nothing. He was going nowhere : he was trying to get away, that was all.

He could not reason about it yet. His head was

in confusion ; a tempest seemed to be raging in his brain.

But as he proceeded on his way, his ideas became more clear. He began to talk to himself.

"Sapristi!" he said, "how stiff I am! quite knocked up, that's clear. Where am I? where shall I go? This sort of thing is not at all amusing."

On each side of the path which he was treading he heard strange sounds, breathings, and patterings.

"There must be some wild beasts about here," he thought.

A shiver ran down his spine at this idea. But he shook off his alarm.

"Come, don't be afraid," he said. "I'm in a hole, and must get out of it. I haven't the least wish to leave my skin here ; here goes!"

He began to run, and heard the stones slide from underneath his feet.

Suddenly he listened intently.

"Eh!" said he. "That must be water. Come, come, wherever can it be?"

As if to answer the question, through the scattered clouds a clear light fell upon the scene before him.

Eusèbe could then see that on his left rose a mighty wall of rock, and that, a few steps before him, a stream of water, as bright as silver, flowed rapidly beneath a fringe of trees and plants.

He approached the water, bent down, and plunged his hands and face into it, then, walking a little way back from the edge, he uttered a cry of admiration.

A rock rose up before him, opening out like the archway of some gigantic bridge ; and a clear, pale moon threw its radiance over the topmost stones, out of a tranquil sky.

"That's in very good taste," he murmured. "It is better done than at the theatre of the Porte St. Martin ! Upon my word, as a drop-scene, it's a great success."

And, placing Captain Queue-de-Rat's parcel in front of him, he took up his cane, and struck an heroic attitude before the moon.

But Eusèbe did not possess a poetical mind, and he would gladly have given all these glories of nature—mountains, rocks, valleys, and torrents—for one little corner of the Boulevard Montmartre. He preferred a society journal to the open book of the universe. Yet he was carried out of himself by admiration. He found the landscape before him 'quite a success.'

Only he wondered where he was. It is needless to say that his geographical knowledge was of the slightest, and that all the names recently heard, from Savannah to Picolata, had not awakened in him the least topographical reminiscence.

He had made one great acquisition, however. Perhaps for the first time in his life Eusèbe began to think seriously, and to understand the old proverb : "Heaven helps those who help themselves."

To help himself! So be it: he was quite ready to take an energetic resolution. But what should it be? Should he go to the right, to the left, straight forward, or back to Picolata? Back? No. He did not care to

fall into the hands of the men who had laughed at him so recently. To the left there was nothing but water : that is to say, for the benefit of our readers, the St. John's river, which, swollen by the rains, did not present a very reassuring appearance. Before him—space, the Unknown, the moon ! Too far off. To the right the scene was different. The rock before which Eusèbe had so resolutely placed himself, formed a sort of natural staircase, with wide landings here and there, which, illumined by the radiance of the moon, had the brilliant whiteness of polished marble.

Suddenly Eusèbe began to wonder what o'clock it was. He had walked for some time, and night appeared to have long closed in. Now Eusèbe had, or ought to have had, a watch, a fine chronometer which went for five days without winding up. But he dared not put his hand into his watch-pocket. Why should the distinguished captain have disdained this valuable ornament ? If he had done so, he must have possessed very small love for the study of horology !

The real reason why Eusèbe found his precious time-keeper was simply this : in the moral and physical prostration produced by the combined effects of intoxication and sea-sickness, he had lain face downwards, and this position had saved his chronometer.

It was nine o'clock at night.

Eusèbe had not dined, and had no expectation of any breakfast next morning. These facts supplied him with many sad reflections, complicated with gentle reminders from his appetite of pressing bodily needs.

Something must be done as soon as possible.

"And I have nothing left—nothing!" he murmured.

His eyes fell upon the bundle which the captain had generously bequeathed to him. Nothing? After all, he had something; and for the first time it occurred to him that this bundle might be of use.

And the gun! That might be of incalculable value to him! And what was there in that plaid?

He must at once examine its contents, and for this purpose it would be well to make himself as comfortable as possible. Those broad marble steps offered every possible facility, and were the more tempting as Eusèbe, although he found himself in a wide open space, was not reassured by certain sounds recently heard, which proved the neighbourhood of wild animals, not always particularly friendly to mankind.

One! two! Eusèbe was young and active. With his bundle on his shoulders he jumped upon the rock, and clinging to its projections, clambered by means of hands and feet to a sort of platform about five yards square, which afforded very safe and comfortable quarters.

Once there, Eusèbe, who was quite tired out, sat down in Turk or tailor fashion, with his legs crossed beneath him, and placed before him the famous parcel, the gun, and the stick.

In spite of himself he could not help laughing, with a Frenchman's instinctive gaiety, as he exclaimed—

"This piece really bristles with improbabilities. It's a pity one gets so hungry! Let me look at the gun."

As he had been an ardent sportsman and a frequenter of shooting-galleries, Eusèbe was not without some technical knowledge of firearms. When he had carefully examined the gun, he clicked his tongue between his teeth in evident satisfaction.

"A first rate gun!" he murmured. "If only I were not so sorry about my thirty-three boxes! For how am I to dress? I shall frighten the very sparrows."

It did not occur to him at the moment that it was not exactly with sparrows that he would have to deal.

"Let's look at the stick. Sapristi! A regular club! a first-class bamboo! Ha!"

These exclamations proceeded from surprise mingled with delight. This stick was really a fishing-rod; and upon unscrewing the handle, Eusèbe drew out successively six pieces, fitting one into the other. At the other end a movable case contained lines, hooks, and complete fishing tackle. This fishing-rod was a marvel of ingenuity. Eusèbe felt inclined to present Captain Queue-de-Rat with a vote of thanks.

Would the parcel offer him any more surprises? He opened it with a kind of timidity, and a new cry escaped his lips. In the midst of other articles which he examined afterwards, he found :

First, a cartridge-box, full.

Secondly, a bowie-knife, big enough to kill an ox.

Thirdly, a revolver and the cartridges belonging to it.

Fourthly—and oh! the praises of this fourth article

ought to have been chanted by Homer on his lyre!—a smoked ham! Yes, a ham that weighed about four pounds, dry as a stone, odorous as a pair of old boots, but a real ham, quite eatable for any one with good teeth, such as Eusèbe possessed, and with which he speedily made an incision into the solid food. By the help of his long knife he cut out a great piece, which tasted to him just then as delicious as the tenderest young rabbit!

To this ham was joined a not less welcome addition, in the shape of a flask, which unfortunately contained nothing but whisky. Eusèbe contented himself with a single mouthful, over which he made a frightful grimace, resolving to replace the burning liquor by the clearest water he could get.

"The coffee is wanting!" sighed Eusèbe. "However . . . !"

He resigned himself to his fate, and by the light of the accommodating moon began to examine the rest of his possessions. It was with a contemptuous curl of the lip that he surveyed a sort of jacket with large buttons. How badly it was cut!—what waste! And those trousers! and that furred greatcoat!—what a hideous shape!

"Ah, how beautifully these American sailors work!" he murmured sarcastically to himself.

Eusèbe's first impulse was to throw the horrible garments into mid-air; but his hand, raised for that purpose, was suddenly stayed. It was very cold. His pea-jacket did not keep his shoulders particularly warm. With courage unequalled by the most vaunted heroes

of antiquity, he resolutely put his arms into the furred greatcoat. It was warm. It was comfortable. He sighed again, but he kept the garment.

Of the other things he made a bundle which might serve as a pillow, examined the gun, loaded and cocked it, opened the bowie-knife and placed it within reach of his hand, carefully readjusted the fishing-rod, then extended himself, or, rather, curled himself up on the cold stone, hummed to himself an air from the opera of Robert le Diable, and tried to go to sleep, repeating the motto of the ancients: ‘Business can wait till to-morrow.’

But matters were not to proceed so smoothly as he had imagined.

Eusèbe was lying upon a flat rock at some unknown altitude above the level of the sea, with untrodden wilds before, behind, and around him. After having lived all his life in Paris, and having experienced no greater danger than that of a crowded thoroughfare, he found himself suddenly transported to the depths of a frightful solitude, but nevertheless, thanks to his courage or his carelessness, he began to grow a little sleepy.

All at once he found himself in a new and alarming position.

He was asleep—or, rather, he was dozing, for his brain was still troubled by remembrances of the past day, and anxieties for the morrow. In the midst of his drowsiness it seemed to him that he heard—though it must have been a dream!—a sort of step, difficult to describe. It was at once scraping and heavy: something like the advance of a tiger on polished marble or ice.

It was a rustling, mingled with a gliding sound.

Half-asleep, Eusèbe dreamed of a great machine with enormous wheels, which, fastened together, creaked like terrible jaws crunching some hard substance.

And he felt something—where was it?—on his foot, his ankle, his leg; something which halted, pressed, pinched!

He uttered a hoarse cry, and sprang to his feet. Before him, on the white stone, he saw a black blotch—a hideous thing—a creature with a double body, from which immense claws were stretched on either side.

Immense: for in the sudden confusion of waking he had lost all conception of size.

It seemed to him that this thing, this hideous, frightful, horrible thing was of gigantic form: the sinister apparition of some antediluvian creature, plesiosaurus or megatherium.

With a furious bound he seized his gun, and brandished it in the air.

It descended. . . .

Bah! the monster had not been touched, but, alarmed by the noise of the weapon, which had struck the stone beside it, it was making off to the nearest hole with all possible speed.

“Never!” exclaimed Eusèbe.

No, indeed! after giving him such a fright, the beast should not regain its home quite so calmly. Eusèbe was furious—partly because the very marrow of his bones had been frozen with terror, partly because he had

just discovered that the monster in question was—what?
—a spider !

He had a horror of spiders ! Certainly, it was not without a shudder that he would have passed at night through a garden where he might have to break through their fine webs ; but what of that ? He was now neither at Auteuil, nor in a garden of the Boulevard Malesherbes.

And then, such a spider ! It was a spider of the largest size, with a body of at least eight inches in circumference, the enemy of small birds, which it attacks in their nests—a horrible creature which has several times been described as presenting in appearance the most vivid realisation of incarnate malice which can possibly be conceived ; a truly frightful insect indeed !

But, after having believed it to be of colossal proportions, when Eusèbe really saw what it was, it appeared to him as contemptible as he had at first thought it terrible. Heroic as a knight of the Round Table, he stooped down and lifted it by one leg.

Much surprised, the creature struggled and tried to free itself. Eusèbe seized it by the body, and, like a Titan hurling mountains at the gods, he launched the spider into space.

Only when he had done this, he felt that he was turning pale, and that his knees were knocking together, and—with all due deference to Mutius Scævola and other heroes of antiquity—he sank down upon the rock, on the point of fainting away.

But as it is true that there is no such thing as an un-

mitigated evil, and that the theory of compensation is not an idle dream, this great and deep emotion had the effect of making him exceedingly sleepy ; and, in spite of the animals which now might wander over him at will, he slept as peacefully as Hercules on the completion of his twelve labours.

For had he not also subdued his hydra-headed monster ?

When he awoke, he uttered a cry of surprise, rubbed his eyes, and sat up.

The darkness had gone. The sun was rising in radiant brightness, and from the height on which he was stationed Eusèbe beheld a glorious scene.

Below him flowed the St. John's River, tranquil enough between its two rapids ; and upon the moving flood the sun was throwing a trail of gold, like a flame reflected in a mirror of steel.

A small island, crowned with green trees, looked like a vessel at anchor on the stream. In the distance a white sail could be seen.

Eusèbe asked himself at first whether he were not the sport of some delusion, or assisting at some fairy-like scene upon the stage. As memory returned to him, he was not less surprised. What ! was this the same country, which at night, in the wind and rain, had seemed so frightful ? He was quite sure that he had been very cold, and now a gentle warmth penetrated his whole being and comforted him. If Eusèbe had known that Florida is called an earthly paradise, he would have understood that though tempests frown sometimes, the

sun yet claims his empire, and, even in winter, awakens, reanimates, consoles the land which well deserves its name of ‘Everglad.’

Not concerning himself much with the why and the wherefore, however, Eusèbe rejoiced in the present ; he leaned back as comfortably as a lady in her stall at the opera, and was very near bestowing a little applause upon the background which Dame Nature—equal to the best scene-painters—had prepared for his delectation. He had quite regained his usual serenity, and, suddenly struck by a new idea which caused him indescribable surprise, he exclaimed aloud,

“ Dear me, I have really been thinking ! ”

It was true. For some minutes his brain had been working in a manner to which it was not at all accustomed. Eusèbe was trying to find some means of escape from the odd situation in which he now found himself.

“ Let me see,” he reflected ; “ there is no mistake about it. I, Eusèbe Lodier, am in the position of Robinson Crusoe. I have had my little shipwreck ; I am threatened by all sorts of dangers. And there is only this to say, that if I am to get out of the scrape, I have nobody to count upon but Coco.”

We know that this was Eusèbe’s nickname for himself.

“ And it is quite clear,” he continued, “ that I must become a hero. ‘ Hard work ! it’s not according to my habits at all ; but, bah ! one must get used to everything. It would have been easier if I had been brought up to the business ; however, that doesn’t matter. ”

“ I’ve got a gun, a fishing-rod, some clothes, and a

ham—I've not got the daily papers; but one must manage as well as one can. Now I have to find New Orleans, at all risks. Not so easy, that, as to act Robinson Crusoe ; still it must be possible.

“ It is evident that Coco Eusèbe has lost his way in some corner or other of the world. But at any rate he is on dry land ; and, unless this place turns out to be an island, there must be some roads leading from here to somewhere. It is one of these roads that I have to find. Hence I draw this conclusion, that sitting still is a very bad method of defence, and that before anything else I must go somewhere—no matter where ; this ‘ somewhere ’ serving as a starting-point from which to go somewhere else.”

This was all very logical, as one must needs confess : the most skilful dialectician could not have found a flaw in the argument.

The conclusion implied a resolution. Eusèbe was thinking for himself. In this, as in so many other things, the beginning was everything.

“ I've begun it,” he murmured to himself ; “ I shall go on thinking now to the end of time.”

Happily it did not seem necessary to delay action for quite so long a period. Scarcely five minutes had elapsed before the gallant Eusèbe was vigorously strapping up Captain Cotraw's bundle, not before having, however, consumed a good slice of the cut ham ; he then fastened the fishing-rod to the bundle, and the bundle to his shoulders, stuck the bowie-knife into his belt, and with one feverishly courageous hand seized the

American rifle, which he had already loaded. He then began to descend the hill, quite prepared to act the part of Ahasuerus, which, as everybody knows, is the family name of the Wandering Jew.

Eusèbe had decided not to return to Picolata. Therefore his first principle was to turn his back upon the town, which he did all the more bravely because he had absolutely no idea whither the contrary direction would lead him.

But how could he be sure that he would not return to it by accident?

M. Eusèbe Lodier proved once more the value of having attended classes at college. He knew that the water before him was a river, and that all rivers flowed to the sea, as the geography books say. By going up the stream, therefore, he must be leaving Picolata behind, as the town was at the mouth of the river.

This course he pursued.

The walk was not an easy one. And how long would it last? a question impossible to answer. Eusèbe wore little boots with high heels, such as had been fashionable in Paris. Here the ground was heaped with intertwining briars, trunks of trees, branches inextricably entangled, which were like so many traps for those unfortunate heels; and at every sixth yard Eusèbe was stopped short, with a disagreeable sensation that some reptile had curled itself round his foot.

Then the effort necessary in order to disengage his foot led to a considerable loss of time, and the journey seemed likely to last for ever.

For the tenth time Eusèbe nearly fell upon his nose, an accident which afforded him many salutary meditations. Once more he thought—he could do no more—and having weighed the reasons for and against, he decided, with the fortitude of a Brutus condemning his children to death, that his heels must have their heads knocked off.

To decide was easy. To execute the sentence was more difficult. Eusèbe's notions on the subject of cobbling were exceedingly vague. Yet it must be done.

He found a palm-tree against which he could lean, and there he resolutely took off one of his boots. It was an odd sight to see this man with one stockinged foot raised a few inches from the ground, while he examined the heel of his boot with deep attention.

He shook his head over it in comical hesitation. At last he resolved to strike one great blow, and for this purpose drew from his belt the captain's mighty bowie-knife. He opened it and looked at the blade, which might have reminded him of the weapon with which De Rohan was beheaded. Then, calm as an executioner, he placed the boot against the tree, raised his arm, and struck with the aforesaid blade upon the aforesaid heel.

The knife was strong, and cut like a razor.

The nails in the heel gave way.

But at that very moment Eusèbe heard behind him a singular noise ; a crashing of trees and branches, a rapid movement over the brushwood.

He turned round and saw, not ten feet from him, red, open jaws, followed by a long, black, narrow body. .

It was only a crocodile.

Let us be just. We may pretend to be strong-minded, and pass ourselves off for the "impavide" individual spoken of by Horace. Still it is none the less true that an encounter with crocodiles—unless one has been brought up in their society since childhood—has nothing in it of a particularly enlivening nature. So let the man who knows not fear be the first to cast a stone at Eusèbe, who, without waiting, started off like a rabbit, running wildly, tearing himself in the thorns, and catching his clothes in the briars, and constantly hearing behind him the approach of the reptile as it wriggled through the herbage, glad and expectant of its prey.

Eusèbe could go no more. He tried to reach the water, but he did not know how to swim. Also he thought he had heard that crocodiles are as much at home in water as on land. It was not a cheerful position.

Suddenly Eusèbe uttered a cry. He had perceived a small vessel anchored in a little bay; he ran towards it. His course could not be very rapid, for, in his fright, he had dropped his boot, and with only a sock on one foot he limped onwards in piteous fashion.

Nevertheless he reached the boat and jumped in.

With one stroke of his knife he severed the cord that had kept it fast.

The boat swung slowly round, yielding to the current, but stopped at the entrance of the bay, caught by the floating weeds.

The crocodile, evidently disappointed, was not at all

inclined to abandon the chance of the delicious meal which fate had sent him ; a meal the more delicious as he had never before tasted any member of the Pois Chiches Club.

He uttered a sort of screech which indicated violent hunger, and which was also, no doubt, a cry for help ; for at the moment when he was plunging into the water after the fugitive, there appeared upon the bank another crocodile—belonging probably to the fairer portion of the crocodile community, for it was accompanied by an interesting little family,—its mouth open, and its tail waving in the breeze like a plume.

Eusèbe, seated at the bottom of the boat, had seized his gun, and with watchful eye awaited the moment when he could commit crocodilicide.

As the paterfamilias of the band was now swimming vigorously towards him, Eusèbe, ready for the attack, shouldered his gun and placed his finger on the trigger.

But just then two new facts occurred. The boat, which Eusèbe had neither attempted nor desired to arrest, detached itself from the weeds which had impeded its course, and was borne onwards by the current.

Eusèbe saw before him the rapidly flowing stream.

And at the same moment there passed before his eyes, with the rapidity of an arrow from a bow, a small canoe, paddled by an Indian—a Redskin—with plumes upon his head.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER ADVENTURE.

IT was a veritable Red Indian ; but, fortunately for Eusèbe, who experienced some alarm at his appearance —having never before seen so strange a personage except upon the boards of the theatre of the Porte St. Martin— he seemed to be too much occupied with the labour of guiding his canoe through the rapid current which threatened to carry it quite away, to take his eye one moment even from his paddles.

So Eusèbe remained unseen.

But there was another danger, which our friend well understood, and which, to tell the truth, did not particularly rejoice his heart either : and this lay in the fact that his own boat, caught by the reflux of the current, was turning round and round as if the thing of wood and bark were hesitating in which direction to overturn the unlucky wanderer.

Fortunately necessity is the mother of invention ; and Eusèbe had pulled too often at Asnières and Argenteuil with the Rowing Club—of which he was one of the most enthusiastic members—to be ignorant of the use of the oar.

Throwing down his gun, he seized the paddle which lay at the bottom of the boat, and with hands that trembled a little, set himself to struggle as vigorously as possible against the stream. But his efforts were in vain. He felt that he was going down the current, and at a little distance he heard the rush of the rapids upon the rocks.

From crocodile to shipwreck! from Scylla to Charybdis!

And to think that at that very hour, in the fair town called Paris, quiet people were snoring peacefully in their beds, enjoying their early morning slumbers, while Eusèbe was fighting against the stream which bore him down with desperate swiftness.

But it seemed to be written in the book of fate that the rising sun should not yet shine upon the last day of Eusèbe's life.

At the very moment when a few yards only lay between him and the line of foam which marked the position of the rapids, over which the Red Indian was now skimming lightly in his canoe, the great trunk of a tree, floating like an immense black arm detached from the bank, drifted up against Eusèbe's boat. It was as though the frail vessel had been seized by a harpoon: closely riveted to the tree it began to follow it in its evolutions. By means of the current, this tree described a vast semi-circle of so wide a circumference that Eusèbe suddenly felt a shock: he had been thrown against the opposite bank from the one on which he had previously been standing. The boat stopped short: it had stuck in a

sort of pool of mud, which the current had deposited over a space of some ten square feet.

The situation was still not particularly attractive. But what did it matter? Eusèbe, who was young and wished to live, was much delighted to have escaped a death which had seemed to be as near as it was inevitable; and this black mud, over which were crawling slimy creatures very much like snakes and toads, looked to him as inviting as the greensward at Versailles. The boat moved no longer, for the trunk of the tree, itself entangled, pushed it deeper and further into the soft black mass. It was a new sort of anchorage.

How should he get out of it? It was a pretty country indeed! And Eusèbe was a fine traveller!—But a mode of action must speedily be decided on, whatever it might happen to be. One could not spend the whole of one's youth on board a canoe.

About three yards of mud had to be crossed. It was true that the bank itself did not present too reassuring an aspect. Of course it is needless to remark that Eusèbe, wholly uninformed on the subject of the American flora, was quite incapable of distinguishing pines from sugar-canies, or magnolia shrubs from the long trails of magnificent creeping tropical bindweed. And amidst the inextricable network of foliage could be heard strange crackings and glidings that were most certainly of evil omen.

But the perpetual spring of gaiety in Eusèbe's heart soon rose again to the surface. He exclaimed, quaintly enough:—

"It's a foot-bath of black mustard, that's all!"

Experience had made him prudent. He tied his bundle carefully on his shoulders, fastened the gun to his strap, and held in his hand only the fishing-rod which was to serve both as a support and a sounding-line; then he rose up in his boat, ready to undertake the work of wading to the shore.

Before venturing forth, he plunged his stick into the mud. By good luck it was not more than six inches deep, and the depth seemed to be nowhere greater, although he sounded it at several points. There was solid ground beneath the mud: so far, so good. One last thought occurred to him: a thought of pity for the poor boot that remained upon his foot, and for his baggy trousers. He carefully removed the boot and stuffed it into his pocket with his socks, then he tucked up his trousers to the knee.

Thus prepared, and exclaiming, "The entertainment is now about to begin!" he plunged resolutely into the mud. How cold, how sickening, how repulsive it was! But one must take things as they come! He floundered on heroically; he stretched his little legs in gigantic strides, and reached the bank without a pause in four steps. There he slid forward between two long black points of mud; and—oh, joy!—found himself on a piece of meadow-land covered with green grass, and which had hitherto been hidden from him by a veil of leaves and branches.

He was on a sort of island formed by the river and fertilised by successive inundations.

Upon the sudden invasion of a human being, whole flocks of birds of the most brilliant colours rose up and fluttered overhead. Eusèbe stood still in mute delight. But presently his eyes sought his feet, and he exclaimed,

"This comes of being in America! What negro feet I have got!"

For certainly his feet might well have rivalled well-brushed boots in blackness.

We must do him the justice to say that, accustomed as he was to the most exquisite neatness, and generally passing two hours a day at his toilet, Eusèbe felt a thrill of disgust, and his first thought was that of repairing this disaster at any cost.

A return to the river was not to be dreamed of: one might as well have plunged into a mud-bath; he therefore walked straight ahead, and in a few minutes observed with pleasure that his instinct had not deceived him.

The river below the rapids was divided by the island into two streams, of which one speedily regained its level and was soon lost to view, while the other fell over a height of some thirty feet into a narrow channel, and was thus conducted to the main stream, which it there peaceably rejoined.

At the foot of this cascade were some flat stones, supporting some fallen trees, which formed a sort of natural bridge, and which rendered the smooth shallow pond below fairly easy of access.

This was the very place—he could not have dreamed

of a better. It was a bathing-room, already fitted up for him !

So thought Eusèbe at once. It was to this place that he would direct his steps. But he prudently saw that before adventuring himself upon the trunks of the trees it would be better to take all precautions for his safety : so he laid down his burden. Then, thinking that the fishing-rod might serve him for a balancing-pole, he drew out its various pieces and put them together.

All this was not ill imagined, and showed that necessity was, indeed, the mother of invention !

He descended by a rocky path to the foot of the cascade, whose waters almost deafened him by their roar, and there he discovered that he could speedily attain a smooth pool where he might perform all necessary ablutions.

The passage across the stream was not a very easy one. But Eusèbe had seen far more difficult ones traversed at the circus. He set boldly out upon his way, venturing on the strongest trunks.

But scarcely had he achieved more than a third part of his perilous transit than he felt himself glued to the place by an emotion half of amazement and half of fantastic terror.

You are perhaps acquainted with a story by Edgar Allan Poe called William Wilson. It is the history of a person who is constantly encountering through life his double, his second self.

Now—hard as it is to believe—below him, in the calm expanse of water that was flowing gently towards the main stream, Eusèbe caught sight of an individual

precisely similar to himself, or, at any rate, seemingly so at that distance.

He wore a little hat and coat, and, stranger still, had a fishing-rod in his hand! And this man, with his trousers tucked up, was crossing the stream in an opposite direction from the one which Eusèbe had meant to follow.

Eusèbe stood so still that he might well have served as a model for a statue of Surprise.

Who was this man? A friend or an enemy? Some Captain Cotraw, or, by chance, an ally? And how could he find out? If Eusèbe crossed the river, he ran the risk of losing sight of the stranger. All things considered, it was better to venture something and discover the truth as quickly as possible.

So Eusèbe, still on his pedestal of trees and stone, made a speaking-trumpet of his hands, and shouted,

“Ohé!”

The wind blew with such strength in Eusèbe’s face that his voice did not seem at first to be heard. He repeated his call with all the force of his lungs.

“Ohé! Monsieur! Gentleman! ohé!”

The man had crossed the ford, and was now at the foot of the rock where Eusèbe was standing.

When there, he jumped upon a stone, and maintaining his balance with remarkable ease, turned quickly to Eusèbe, who, determined to enter into some sort of conversation with him, now began a most expressive system of telegraphic pantomime.

The man put down his line, as well as a sort of box

that he was carrying. He then deliberately took a revolver from his belt, and screwing up one eye—for he had only one—seemed to be attentively and distrustfully considering Eusèbe and his continued appeals.

“What the deuce!” he muttered. “Must I get rid of him?”

Certainly if these words had reached Eusèbe’s ears, and he had comprehended them, he might have regretted his interview with the crocodiles. But seeing only that the man had stopped, and not discovering in him any hostile intentions, he noticed at some little distance a rock over which he could easily descend to the stranger, and to this point he resolutely began to advance.

The other waited, revolver in hand, shouting to him, but in English,

“Stop where you are, or I fire!”

He might have talked for an hour in the same strain without producing much effect. But Eusèbe was already very few paces off, and was propping himself up against a stone with the appearance of being much out of breath.

“Well, Monsieur,” he said; “suppose you give me a reference.”

At this voice, and at these words, spoken in the purest French, the unknown lowered his pistol and replied in the same language, though with an American accent,

“What do you want? Who are you?”

“He speaks French!” exclaimed Eusèbe, with a burst of joy. “Monsieur, I am a charming young man, who has found himself by chance a good way from

home, and very much wants somebody to show him the way . . .”

“ Advance.”

“ Here I am.”

“ Where do you come from ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

“ Where are you going ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

“ Are you joking with me ? ”

“ Not in the least, honourable sir. I profess that I speak nothing but the truth. I come from Paris, but I have strayed rather out of my way ; and as for knowing where I am going to, the deuce take me if I have the faintest idea.”

The other darted a piercing glance at him from his one eye.

“ You are a Frenchman ? ” he asked, somewhat roughly.

“ A Frenchman and a wit ; yes, Monsieur.”

“ Then, what are you doing in Florida ? ”

“ Oh, that’s a long story—which I will tell you if you like. Nevertheless, before beginning so long and so interesting a narration, can you not say whether you will consent to be my guide ? ”

“ Perhaps. What’s your name ? ”

“ Oh ! you are a policeman. Eusèbe Lodier.”

“ Lodier ! ” murmured the man thoughtfully. “ It seems to me that I have heard that name before—some-where or other . . .”

He continued, aloud,

"Do you know any one here?"

"Here! In these wild deserts! Heaven preserve me!"

"But in America—no matter where: for you ask me to guide you—whither? Can I possibly guess?"

"There, my good fellow; don't be angry. I am going to explain all that. Is it far from here to New Orleans?"

"You are mad!"

"I don't think so. I will give you my name and address. I must as soon as possible get to Battle Field, M. Valville's plantation. Do you know it?"

"Battle Field! Valville!" exclaimed the man, starting forward in his surprise. "Yes, indeed. And your name—Lodier? You have a sister?"

"So I flatter myself."

"Who is called . . ."

"Alice! Just so; but you are not very polite."

"And you know M. Charles Valville?"

"I dined with him not a month ago: also, with a good sort of Yankee, Doctor Freedy."

The man made one step towards him, placed his two hands on his shoulders, and looked at him with the attention of a police officer who wants to verify a description.

"This is possible," he said; "but it is not certain. You have a Frenchman's head; but other proofs are none the less necessary . . ."

"Eh, parbleu!" cried Eusèbe, quite out of patience; "there's my card."

And he presented a bit of pasteboard, which the other immediately perused.

"Under these circumstances, M. Eusèbe Lodier," he said with a slight bow, "I put myself at your disposal."

"And you will take me to New Orleans?"

"At any rate I will take you to M. Valville."

"Soon?"

"Before this evening."

"You are a charming man! Would you kindly tell me, in your turn, whom I shall have the pleasure of thanking,—in other words, what is your name?"

"As to that, sir," replied the other, "you would be no wiser if you did know it. Come, we have no time to lose: are you ready to follow me?"

"I have left my luggage and my gun up there: I only want to fetch them."

"Do so: I will wait for you here; but make haste."

Eusèbe was delighted. The conversation had ended better than it had begun.

The reader will have already recognised Ned Bark, the detective.

There was nothing astonishing in the fact that he should be found in Florida, on the banks of the St. John's River, if we remember the council of war held by Ned Bark, Freedy, Valville, and Woodman, at the latter's plantation.

But how did it happen that he had arrived at the very place where he met Eusèbe?

Let us at first remark that the detective was absolutely unrecognisable. A fringe of beard and whiskers hid the

lower part of his face, and his hat was drawn so far over his forehead as to render his infirmity of sight quite invisible at some little distance. Then the line in his hand gave him the appearance of a peaceful fisherman waging war with simple fishes, and not with the assassins of Battle Field. He was well versed in the art of costume, for in the rather fat, broad-shouldered man, one would not soon have recognised the peculiarly thin and agile detective.

As regards what he had been doing, we shall soon hear his own account.

Eusèbe did not lose a moment. He dipped his feet hurriedly into the foaming waters of the cascade: a summary way of making his toilet, with which he had to content himself. Then, in honour of his guide, he put on his socks and his one boot, for, as we well know, he had left the other as food for the crocodile family.

With the captain's bundle on his back, and the gun in his hand, he descended the rocky footpath, and stood again at Ned Bark's side.

During the short time that his absence had lasted, a complete transformation had taken place in the detective's appearance. He had removed the clothes which had given him a heavy look, and hidden them in the box beneath his arm; he had put away his fishing-rod, had fastened round his waist a belt containing two revolvers and a bowie-knife, and, in short, had metamorphosed the calm fisherman into a very warlike and active-looking individual.

"Don't be surprised," said Ned, seeing that Eusèbe was regarding him in utter amazement. "In order to reach this place without being recognised, I was obliged to take precautions which now are useless. I will be myself again."

And, to complete the change, Ned took off the beard which covered his chin, and put it in his pocket.

"Who can this fellow be?" thought Eusèbe, quite bewildered.

"Now," said Ned, "listen carefully to me. I have not the time at present to hear about your adventures, and I cannot take you away with me. You will be good enough to hide in a place which I will point out to you; and to remain there perfectly quiet for an hour or two. You will be so kind as to wait for me till I return for you; after which I will do what you have asked."

"Hum!" said Eusèbe with a grimace. "This is not very clear."

"Clear or not, don't trouble about that, unless you wish to resume your solitary walk across Florida."

"Not at all."

"Then you will obey?"

"I suppose I must."

"Come, then, and, above everything, bend down beneath the high grass. If your head rises above it, you run great risk of receiving a ball there."

"What an odd country!" said Eusèbe, beginning to feel quite accustomed to the singularity of his position.

They walked on through the tangled shrubs.

Eusèbe, with one boot off and one boot on, was not

very comfortable ; but he kept up his spirits in spite of discomfort.

Ned said no more. They walked on in this manner for nearly an hour. They left the cascade behind them, and followed the course of the St. John's River.

At last Ned stopped short.

" You see that palm-tree ? " he said. " You must climb it and hide yourself in the branches as quickly as possible ."

" It is rather high ."

" You are young, you ought to be agile. And you must do it. Let me see, you should be able to give me a signal. Have you, by chance, as a Parisian, any special cry, anything extraordinary by which I could recognise you anywhere ? "

Eusèbe thought for a moment.

" I've got it ."

And he uttered the strident cry of Parisian students and workmen :

" Pi—ouitt ! "

" Bravo ! " said Ned. " Well, listen. From up there you must watch the river. In an hour, or two hours at the most, you will see a flat boat loaded with wood, which will stop just opposite this place ."

" Well ? "

" Then you must give that cry as loudly as you can ."

" Agreed ."

" You will get down the tree and run to the bank ."

" I will ."

" There you must wait for me ."

" And the boat ? "

"Ask nothing more about it. Come, climb! you have made me lose time."

"At your orders, my lord."

And he began to climb gaily enough.

"It will be quite comfortable up there," he said.

"Don't forget any of my directions. I shall see you again presently." And Ned Bark disappeared.

But this (presently) was long in coming. The sun had begun to sink below the horizon before Eusèbe, whose patience had never failed him for a single moment, beheld from his perch the approach and arrival of a boat, easily to be recognised as the one of which he had been told.

"Pi—ouitt!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

Then he slipped down the tree, and made for the bank.

He had not long to wait, for he saw Ned Bark running towards him as swiftly as his limbs would carry him.

"Throw yourself into the water," he cried to Eusèbe, "or you are a lost man."

"But I cannot swim."

"Then trust to me."

Ned pushed him at once into the water and jumped in with him, holding him by the collar. He struck out with all his might towards the boat.

But at the same moment several Redskins appeared upon the bank, armed with knives and hatchets.

And one of them threw himself into the river in pursuit of the fugitives.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PURSUIT.

NED BARK was strong ; and in spite of his burden, he reached the boat with a few vigorous strokes.

Two black forms stood erect on the deck, and strong hands seized them both. In a couple of minutes the two men were safe.

"Fire ! fire anywhere !" commanded Ned Bark.

Two reports were heard. Ned remained leaning over the side of the boat, trying to see through the shadows which darkened the face of the river. It seemed as if the man who had thrown himself into the water after them, had grown weary of his pursuit and retraced his path. No sound reached the ear ; no movement troubled the calm waters.

"What has happened ?" asked a young clear voice.

"Mr. Valville," replied Ned, "I found the track ; though I fear we have only exposed ourselves to new dangers ; but first of all, let us get away from here, for the Seminoles have got wind of us, and although they do not know who we are, it is evident that with their savage instinct they guess that we are their enemies. So to the oars, and let us reach St. Augustine as quickly as possible."

Valville and Freedy, for these were the two men to whom Ned Bark addressed himself, had become quite accustomed to render implicit obedience to the detective. They plunged into the water the long oars with which they were provided, and the boat—more lightly than one would have thought possible from its apparently heavy build, and the load that it seemed to carry—sped away into the night.

Meanwhile, Eusèbe, totally forgotten by everybody, remained at the bottom of the boat, drenched, dazed, and motionless. What had passed was so quickly over, that he had not had time to recover himself. Besides, he had a horror of cold water; and even at Paris preferred the lukewarmness of the Turkish baths to the swift current of the Seine.

But when he had sneezed some twenty times, Ned Bark, who was still attentively scanning the black depths before him, suddenly remembered the stranger whom he had hoisted on board like a parcel, and turned to him.

“A thousand pardons, sir,” said he, “we will attend to you immediately.”

“Ah! that’s you,” sighed Eusèbe. “Sapristi, how cold I am! Where am I?”

“With friends; at least if you told me the truth.”

“I am true as steel, but I am frozen. I feel as if I had had a good beating with a stick.”

“A little patience; keep still, you will be warm enough presently.”

“To whom are you speaking?” asked Valville, addressing himself to Ned in English. Then he added

quickly : "True, I had hardly noticed it : you were not alone just now."

"Silence, if you please," said Ned authoritatively ; "we are in the enemy's country."

Eusèbe, who would certainly have recognised Valville's voice, if Valville had only spoken French, curled himself up in his corner, and said nothing ; finally grew drowsy, and fell fast asleep.

The boat went on and on. Several times Ned Bark started and bent down to the water, almost near enough to touch it, as if he imagined that some adversary could rise up against them from its depths.

All at once, he cried : "Ship your oars ! stop !"

At the same time a shot rang through the air.

Valville and Freedy sprang to the side of Ned Bark, who had fired.

"What is it ?" they cried at the same moment.

"How should I know ?" snarled Ned with an oath.

"Why did you fire ?"

"Well, really," said the detective, "I do not know whether I am foolishly anxious in my old age, but ever since we set off it has seemed to me that we were followed."

"Followed ! impossible ! we have gone ten or twelve miles : a man could not perform such a feat of swimming as that !"

"A man ? no ! but a Seminole could ! I will give you an example of the energy and obstinacy of these last remaining Indians. During their recent struggle with the troops of the Union, about thirty of them were

hemmed in on the borders of the river Oclawaha. We thought we had got them : not at all ! They threw themselves into the water, and for thirty hours—do you hear ? for thirty hours !—they had to be chased. They dived, lay at the bottom of the water, reappeared, disappeared : the balls whistled round their heads without touching them, so supernaturally quick were their movements ! At last, in order to terminate the contest, their lives were promised them, and they approached the banks. But as soon as they touched the earth, they sank down : some, never to rise again. They had had sufficient physical energy to resist up to the very last moment ; and they died only when they were not obliged to defend themselves."

"Do you know," said Freedy, "that they are worthy of our admiration ? "

"Hum !" returned Ned Bark, with a shrug of his shoulders ; "say that they were very energetic, and I will agree with you. Nowadays they are merely brigands who find in assassination and treachery the satisfaction of a vengeance which is forbidden to them in loyal combat."

"So be it ; but what makes you think that we are pursued ? "

"Nothing, and everything. You must first know, that as I crept through the grass I found, down there on Long Island, as that barricade of the St. John is called, an encampment of Seminoles. I approached them on hands and knees, and watched them attentively. Bloody Foot was not with them. But

they belonged to his tribe. You know to what a degree the senses of these men are sharpened, and how difficult it is to deceive their hearing or their sight. Happily I knew by what means to put them off the scent. I managed to approach them so closely, as to catch some of the words that they were interchanging."

"Then you know their language?" said Valville, with some surprise.

"Oh, my education is complete," said Ned, laughing. "Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles have nothing more to teach me. But at first I heard nothing that was likely to be of any use to us, until suddenly a man appeared upon the stream, skilfully directing the course of his canoe until it reached the bank.

"The Seminoles rose, and then, with outstretched arms, fell on the ground before him. This time it was he—their chief, the Bloody Foot!"

"My father's murderer!" exclaimed the young man. "The wretch who dared to attack my dear sister! Ah! why was I not there? How gladly I would have lodged a bullet in his head!"

"And you would have managed very badly, allow me to say," said Ned, with a coolness that nothing overthrew. "I covered Bloody Foot with my gun; but, I thought, if he dies, we shall lose all trace of him, and it is by means of his movements that we may probably discover the whereabouts of Red Ralph and the other robbers."

"That is true!" murmured Valville.

"And by not killing him, I managed so well,"

pursued the detective, "that I should know now how to find my way again to these wretches."

"Ah! speak! tell me how! quickly."

"No, not yet: above all, not here. You think that on a river, at dead of night, we are in safety? No, for at the moment when a signal told me that you had reached the point of meeting which I had assigned to you, I was perceived by the Seminoles, who rushed in pursuit of me. You saw I had only time to throw myself into the water before one of those demons threw himself in behind me. Well! I tell you, that this man is following us, there, in the dark water; I tell you that while we are waiting, he is crouching there, somewhere, watching us with burning eyes that can see through the darkness . . ."

"He! help! help! the monster!" suddenly shrieked a voice.

And Eusèbe stood up in the middle of the boat.

"What? what's the matter?" asked Ned.

Eusèbe, his teeth chattering, spoke with extended hand.

"Here, under the bank, I saw a shadow, a head!"

"Ah! you saw right!" exclaimed Ned, springing forward.

"But who spoke?" said Valville, who could not believe his ears.

This time he was speaking French.

"Charles!" exclaimed Eusèbe. "Is it you?"

"Eusèbe! Eusèbe—here?"

"Yes, Eusèbe himself."

At this moment Ned Bark returned.

"Enough exclamations of that sort!" he said in his tone of command. "I knew quite well that I was not mistaken. Let us go no farther, but land at once. The man pursuing us will perhaps not risk his life on solid ground. Do this, and at once."

By the vigorous efforts of the two men, the boat was soon moored close to the river bank.

CHAPTER X.

INDIANS AND SNAKES.

SINCE the moment when Ned Bark gave the order to land, not a word had been interchanged between the different members of the party.

It was felt that they must endeavour to escape from this unknown but imminent danger as quickly as possible. Valville and Freedy, bending over their boat-hooks, directed the course of the boat along the coast, in search of a suitable landing-place.

In that place the eastern bank of the St. John's River was bordered by a sort of cliff, as if the water had worn for itself a channel through the fissure of some rocky mountain.

Its bed was also encumbered with water-plants, which wound themselves round the prow of the boat and rendered its progress very slow.

At last Ned Bark gave the word : "Stop."

The boat ran into a bed of mud and remained motionless.

With a vigorous bound Freedy gained the bank, where he unwound and knotted securely to a palm-tree the rope which Valville threw him.

For the last time Ned Bark walked round the boat

and carefully examined the neighbourhood with his piercing eye.

No noise. Had the Seminole really relinquished his pursuit? Had fatigue compelled him to land on the opposite bank?

Meanwhile Eusèbe, wet and exhausted, lay quietly at the bottom of the boat.

"Come! take courage!" said Ned Bark, giving him an energetic shake; "we have arrived."

But the lad seemed scarcely to hear him. His brain was in a whirl. The voice of Valville had certainly struck his ear; and yet it seemed to him as though he were living only in a dream.

"Johnson!" cried Ned; "lift up that fellow."

From the other end of the boat a tall form rose and advanced to Eusèbe, over whom it bent.

It seemed to be a form of colossal size. Eusèbe, whose eyes were dim, and who, in the early dawn of day, had a very vague perception of what was passing around him, believed that some enormous ghost was about to attack him.

"Here I am!" he murmured. "Come on!"

But the ghost opened its arms and seized him with remarkable vigour, and Eusèbe found himself perched upon vast shoulders in company with an immense bundle, which the ghost in question carried with extraordinary ease.

This form—gigantic, but not at all supernatural—was simply that of a Kentuckian named Johnson, whom the travellers had hired at Jacksonville to carry their luggage.

He had philosophically hoisted Eusèbe on his shoulders as one burden the more; a burden which he deposited on the bank with so little precaution that Eusèbe, recalled to a sense of the situation by the rude shock, exclaimed,

"Sapredié! this fellow's going to demolish me altogether!"

Valville had hastened to his side.

"Eusèbe! you here? This is perfectly miraculous!"

"Oh, miracles have gone out of fashion," said Eusèbe, shivering. "You simply see before you a charming young man who nearly died of ennui when he was left all alone in Paris, and who therefore thought of making a little tour with his walking-stick, but who is rapidly freezing on the way."

"My dear Eusèbe, you are really frozen!"

"Like iced coffee! Ah! a nice country, this is! crocodiles, and monkeys with feathers on their heads! Just give me Captain Queue-de-Rat's coat—it ought to be somewhere about. . . ."

The Kentuckian, always composed, had already returned to the boat, and now brought back Eusèbe's parcel, as well as the gun and the fishing-rod. Eusèbe wrapped himself up in the coat.

"Don't let us lose a minute," said Ned Bark. "We must now get back to the St. Augustine road."

"Do you know the way?" asked Freedy.

"Certainly. We must mount this hill, and on the other side we shall reach the plain. We shall have to cross swamps and marshes, but we must go as fast as we can."

"Let us be off then."

To tell the truth, it was not a hill but a sort of rock that they had to ascend. There was no certain path; but it could be climbed by a sort of rough projection on the edge of a precipice.

It was a difficult ascent: so difficult, that at the end of a few minutes Eusèbe was warm enough—even too warm. They had to stop while he arranged his bundle on his shoulders again, and then, with somewhat feverish activity, and with the help of his famous fishing-rod, he marched on bravely, keeping to the front, and turning round from time to time to call to the others. In a few words he recounted his adventures to Valville; he had already recovered his Parisian gaiety and glibness of tongue; and with his usual admixture of street-slang, informed his friends that his journey had been a great success.

But Ned Bark kept apart, and advancing now and then to the extreme edge of the rock, he leaned over it, endeavouring to fathom with his eye the abyss beside which they walked.

He would not share his anxiety with his companions, but he had nevertheless very grave reasons for it.

The rock was covered with trees, which the wind, blowing from the sea, had bent and twisted into strange fantastic shapes.

This wood had formerly been turned to use by trappers. Down the ravine, which cut the rock in two as if it had been divided by the stroke of an axe, leaped a foaming torrent. Formerly, woodcutters wishing to convey the

felled wood to the St. John's River, whence it would be floated down to its destination, had constructed in the ravine a way of descent, composed of the trunks of trees tied together and fastened to transverse bars, like those so much used in Alsace, which served to keep the rest in their place to the bottom of the cliff. These steps were now nearly destroyed; but in the dark shadow of the torrent, through which faintly gleamed the luminous whiteness of the falling water, Ned Bark could still distinguish the remains of this primitive ladder.

Several times it had appeared to him that he could also see a dark shadow crouching on the rungs of the ladder; but in vain he concentrated all his attention upon it. He was constrained to believe himself the victim of some delusion.

Moreover, what human being would be so bold as to follow that perilous course in almost complete darkness, where the slightest imprudence or the merest accident would infallibly lead to instant death?

"Here is the plain!" exclaimed Valville, as he arrived at the summit of the cliff.

At their feet there stretched away a vast extent of wood and swamp, beneath the clear light of rising day.

Once again Ned Bark examined with his eye the spot which had so long enthralled his attention. Nothing. Evidently he had been mistaken.

They began the descent to the plain before them.

They entered the pathless cypress-groves. There is nothing more unpleasant than walking through a network of branches and creepers, amidst which can be

heard strange noises and curious gliding sounds. With watchful ears, and fingers on the triggers of their guns, our friends hastened forward; but notwithstanding the desire to uphold his own dignity, Eusèbe was hardly able to walk any longer. Freedy had given him his arm, and encouraged him to proceed.

Pale, but laughing still, Eusèbe was murmuring,

“ Ah, if a cab would only pass this way ! ”

But as one could hardly expect to get a cab, there was nothing for it but to walk and walk !

Ned Bark, continually haunted by one idea, darted aside into the deepest thickets several times. As they went on, it seemed to him that he heard behind him an occasional rustle of leaves, as if they were followed by some living being, not far off. He stopped; but all was still.

“ I know,” he said at last, “ that at a short distance from the road we shall find the ruins of an old deserted fort. We can rest there for a few minutes, and decide upon our future plans.”

These words restored a little strength to Eusèbe’s failing limbs. What would he not have given at that moment to be able to lie down, no matter where or how !

Presently they came in sight of the much-needed resting-place. Amidst an inextricable thicket, a few heaps of crumbling stone marked the place where once had stood one of those forts built by the early occupants of the country, which nature was now reconquering by means of a luxuriant overgrowth of vegetation.

Within these mouldering walls there still remained

one room, the floor of which had long since been destroyed, but over which the trappers had made a sort of roof composed of interwoven branches.

"Oh, what a pretty dressing-room!" exclaimed Eusèbe.

Then with a sigh he sank down upon the ground, muttering,

"Oh, upon my word I can't keep it up any longer—I can't walk a step farther."

"You must sleep, comrade," said Ned Bark. "A few hours' rest will set you on your legs again."

"I hope so! but this seems a very hard sort of place to lie in."

"We will manage that. Johnson, undo those bundles."

"And then there's another thing!" said Eusèbe.

"Speak out."

"My feet are in such a state. Just look!"

"Ah! poor fellow!" cried Freedy, as he saw the bleeding feet, which, ever since the adventure with the crocodile, had possessed but one boot between them.

And such a boot, too! for the thin kid had not long been able to resist the roughness of the way. It was torn to pieces and hung in strips, which revealed the reddened sock between.

"Fortunately," said Freedy, "I have my little medicine-chest with me."

So saying, he helped Johnson to unfasten the straps that secured their luggage, and took out a box which he opened, and which proved to be full of phials of differ-

ent sizes. In a few moments he had covered the young man's aching feet with bandages.

But Eusèbe's attention was suddenly fixed upon a certain object disinterred from the aforesaid luggage.

This object was a magnificent pair of boots.

"Oh, what nice boots!" said Eusèbe in the tone of a child who wants a piece of cake. "Do give them to me!"

"Most willingly," said Valville laughing. "You well deserve them!"

Eusèbe took possession of them with a delighted gesture. They were certainly splendid boots, and attracted him by a somewhat theatrical association. Dumaine, his favourite actor, had worn a pair precisely similar in the drama *The Pirates of the Savannah*. One may imagine their charm for him.

And while the others were spreading cloaks and rugs upon the ground in order to make him a softer bed, Eusèbe craftily slipped the boots into the place where his head would lie, against the wall: ostensibly for a bolster, but really that he might not be separated from his treasures.

Nature will not cede her claims; and Eusèbe was not yet twenty. At the end of a few minutes he was sleeping—shall we say that he was also snoring?—the sleep of innocence!

The Kentuckian had also stretched himself in a corner, and was fast asleep.

The three friends were practically alone.

"Now," said Valville in a low voice, "it remains for

you, my dear Ned Bark, to tell us the story of what happened to you, and the information which you obtained."

"Unfortunately I cannot give you any important news," said the detective. "As I told you, when I crept on all fours to the Indian encampment, I found out that we had to do with Seminoles; that is, with the last remaining survivors of a wandering tribe of bandits, the mercenaries of crime, ready to sell themselves to any one who can pay them. But when I saw Bloody Foot, I did hope that I should catch some words which would put me upon Red Ralph's track."

"Well?"

"The Indians are hard to deceive; and even when they suspect no spies, they take great precautions. They spoke in such low voices that none of their words reached my ears; but the pantomime of the chief—and in all these primitive races you know how eloquent gesture is—assured me that he was speaking of money to be received and booty to be divided. No doubt they were thinking of the reward which Red Ralph must have promised them; and perhaps also, according to the habit of these adventurers, he has made them wait an unreasonable length of time for it. Bloody Foot's attitude was a threatening one. The others approved, and received his statements with growls of anger. Finally, Bloody Foot—in this I am sure I was not mistaken—appointed a place of meeting. Pointing to the east, he gave them long and minute directions. But it was at this moment that, by that diabolical instinct which

seems almost supernatural, one of these demons appeared suddenly to suspect the presence of an unseen auditor, and that they all rushed in pursuit of me. You know the rest. I escaped by a miracle; but I have to pay them out yet, and I shall not fail to do it."

"I count on you to keep your word," said Freedy. "But in the present state of things, it seems to me that we are just working at haphazard!"

"Not altogether. The presence of the Seminoles in this part of the country, where they seldom venture, must be connected with a set of facts which will not, I am sure, have escaped general attention. We will go on to St. Augustine, and there set minute inquiries on foot. Red Ralph is known everywhere. If he has been here lately, we shall soon hear—and . . ."

Ned Bark did not finish his sentence.

Suddenly he started from his seat, reached the door with one bound, and rushed out of the fortress.

Valville and Freedy rose also, full of anxiety, and, guessing that some new incident was about to occur, or that perhaps some new peril was near, they took their guns and followed in Ned Bark's footsteps.

But when they had passed through the door they perceived nothing.

We have said that the ruins of the old fort were literally hidden by the vegetation that covered them.

Where was the detective? Freedy listened, with head eagerly advanced.

Suddenly they saw that the branches at some little

distance were agitated by vigorous movements which might proceed from a struggle between men or animals.

And yet no noise, no cry had reached their ears.

"Forward!" said Freedy.

And the two friends ran in that direction.

In a few seconds they gained the spot, and there they beheld Ned Bark, standing calmly beneath the trees, with a smile upon his face, although his forehead was bleeding from a wound.

With his hand he pointed to a shapeless heap upon the ground.

"This time," he said, "I have made a trick."

They then discovered that it was an Indian who lay before them in the grass, with hands and feet tied.

"Is he dead?" asked Valville.

"Surely not!" replied Ned. "I have too great an interest in keeping him alive."

"Do at least explain . . ."

"Nothing simpler. I told you that one of those devils was on our track from the moment I gained the boat. Eusèbe, too, saw the wretch; so doubt was impossible. But, as I told you, I did not think that he would be so bold as to continue his man-hunt on land. I was mistaken. And while we were climbing the hill and crossing the cypress-grove, certain curious signs gave me much reason for anxiety. Now I know. This man, obeying his chief, climbed the rock by means of those wooden ledges, to which the most agile monkey might have hesitated to trust his weight. He followed us on all fours through the grass, so skilfully, that in spite

of my suspicions, it was impossible for me to surprise him. But here he was imprudent."

"Go on."

"While we were talking just now in the ruins, I kept my eyes fixed on the roof of branches. I had noticed a sort of movement, and—in fact, by and by, the Indian, not being able to hear very distinctly what we were saying, ventured to separate the branches a little. It was then that I saw him, and sprang up. He thought he could again escape me. But this time I wanted my revenge, and swore that I would not be beaten. I dashed after him and reached his side. He aimed a blow at me with his tomahawk, which fortunately glanced aside, and only grazed the skin. But I threw myself upon him, brought him to the earth, and, you see," he added, pointing to the Seminole's bonds, "I have put it out of his power, I think, to go and give an account of his mission."

"But what do you mean to do with this man?"

"A very simple thing. We are going to take this robber with us to St. Augustine, and there place him in the hands of the authorities. And I promise you he will speak, and sell his accomplices."

"Do you think so?" said Freedy, shaking his head doubtfully.

"Don't be afraid. They will not use torture. It will be quite sufficient to shut the man up in Fort Marion. For these children of the forests the worst torture is that of the loss of liberty."

"But look!" exclaimed Valviile, "the man is dying!"

Ned uttered a cry, and bent over the Seminole.

What Valville said was only too true. The Indian's face was frightfully convulsed, and a greenish bloody foam was standing on his lips.

"He is dead!" exclaimed Freedy in his turn. "It is so really. Under our very eyes the wretched man has poisoned himself. Ah, Ned Bark, you thought that he would sell his accomplices! you see he chose rather to kill himself."

"But it is impossible!" cried Ned Bark. "He has made no movement; his hands have not even stirred."

"Look here," said Freedy, stooping down.

The Indian's head was resting on the trunk of a cypress-tree, half buried in the dank waters of the marsh.

The wood was almost entirely concealed by a parti-coloured growth of lichens, amidst which toad-stools of all shapes, heights, and colours, could be seen.

"He has poisoned himself, I tell you, with wonderful strength of will. It was quite sufficient for him to turn his head and bite this toad-stool, of which, you see, he has severed a portion with his teeth."

It was a white toad-stool of great beauty, supported upon a stalk of azure blue.

"A deadly poison," added Freedy. "He chose well."

There was a moment's silence. Although Valville had his own reasons for hating and despising this savage race, yet the calm fortitude of the Indian's death struck a thrill of admiration to his heart.

And this was the second corpse which had already marked the course of his avenging way.

"What men!" he murmured. "Why must their energy always be lost to civilisation?"

Then, turning to Ned Bark, he asked—

"Must we leave this wretched man without burial?"

"I'll take care of that," said the detective. "After all, he was a brave man, and I respect courage even in my enemies. But," he added, addressing himself to Freedy, "return to the ruins; it is not prudent to separate ourselves one from another. Go, and in a few moments I will rejoin you."

"Come," said Freedy, leading away Valville, whose emotion had communicated itself to his friend.

"Don't be long, Ned," said Valville to the detective.

"I will be with you in five minutes."

Without a word to each other, the two men returned to the little fort.

As they opened the door, Eusèbe, still half asleep, said suddenly,

"Ah! what is this horrible odour? Sapristi! one ought to have some eau-de-Cologne here."

And in fact a strange, penetrating, sickening smell filled the whole place.

"What can it be?" whispered Valville to Freedy.

The American started, but so slightly that no one noticed his emotion. With a slow gesture, he stooped and picked up Eusèbe's stick, then made one step towards him.

"Listen," he said, "and on your life do not say a word, or make a single movement, how small soever. Understand that the slightest movement is immediate,

horrible death. You have courage: prove it now. I will tell you what is happening. Somewhere, amongst your wraps, or under your head, is a snake, the copper-headed snake, whose bite is deadly. If you do not move I will answer for your safety; if you do, it will be your death."

There was a fearful silence.

Slowly, so slowly, that one could scarcely see him move, Freedy bent down. With his stick he gently rustled and scratched the cloak upon which Eusèbe's head was lying. The young man, with true courage, obeyed orders, and compelled himself not even to shudder.

At last something greenish, something that looked like a bit of bronzed metal, issued from one of the boots which Eusèbe had so carefully wrapped together for a bolster.

It was the head of the snake.

Freedy was close to it, and no sooner had the neck appeared, than, with a single blow, he nailed it down to the ground and crushed it.

The terrible creature was killed. From its crooked fangs oozed out a yellow liquid with an unbearably horrible smell.

"M. Eusèbe," said Freedy, offering him his hand, "you may congratulate yourself on having, by your presence of mind, escaped the most terrible danger that a man can incur in this fortunate country."

"Thank you . . . thank you," stammered Eusèbe; "but . . . it seems to me . . . that it was you . . . who killed . . . the snake . . ."

"Just so! but if you had moved in the slightest degree, it would have jumped out of its hiding-place, and one of us would certainly have been attacked."

Ned Bark entered at this moment, and seeing that every one looked pale, asked what had happened. For answer, Freedy pulled out of the boot the rest of the snake's body, which measured more than five feet in length.

"Heavens!" cried Ned Bark, who was a brave man, nevertheless, jumping two steps back as he spoke, "what an ugly chance!"

"Bah! don't talk of it any longer," said Freedy.
"Now tell us your plans."

"Oh, they are very simple. More than ever, we must go to St. Augustine."

"Have you anything new to tell us?"

"Yes. First, I should say that I rendered the last honours of war to that rascal of a Seminole, whose courage touched me in spite of myself."

"Ah, that is right," said Valville. "You have committed his body to the earth?"

"Whew!" said Ned Bark, laughing. "It is easy to see that you don't know much of those gentlemen. If I had done that, he would have been ready to come to life again and scalp me."

"Which means. . . . ?"

"That an Indian would regard it as terribly shameful to be buried like us white people. The corpse of an Indian is always placed in the branches of a tree, out of reach of wild beasts, but not of birds; and it stays there until, as they say, it is restored to air."

"Then you have put your Indian up a tree?"

"Exactly so: but first I searched him."

"Ah! and what did you find?" asked Freedy. "I suppose he would not have a pocket-book with pencil notes about him?"

"No; but he had this," said Ned Bark, drawing from his pocket a thin layer of bark, on which certain marks seemed to have been irregularly traced by the point of an arrow.

Valville took the piece of bark in his hand, and examined it attentively.

"I cannot understand these hieroglyphics," he said.

"Then I will help you. You see this dotted line against which some horizontal marks are drawn—much like the lines by which the sea is indicated in maps?"

"Well?"

"Well, this is a map, too, and that is the sea. This other line parallel to the sea is the St. John's River. Now, here, this round place is St. Augustine. Then a pointed line follows the coast, and stops all at once. This stoppage is just opposite Pilatka. This is simply the map of a journey. And the Seminole in question was to go to this place, opposite Pilatka. What place it is, I do not know; but at St. Augustine it will not be difficult to obtain information. The man would not speak, but he could not but be aware that I knew the tricks of the Indian gentlemen as well as he did! It was this point—still unknown to us—that the Indian indicated by his gesture to the sea; and I swear to you,

my good friends, that I will find it, and that there we will have good sport!"

"I hope so!" said Valville.

"On, then!" said Freedy. "Ned Bark has given us too many proofs of his clear-headedness, that we should lose confidence in him now."

"Oh, I do not doubt him!" cried Valville, giving his hand to the detective.

"Forward then! This is the time when the stage-coach passes. Let us be off to St. Augustine."

An hour later they were being drawn to that town by four fast-trotting horses.

About three-quarters of a mile from St. Augustine, the coach, or the omnibus, suddenly stopped before a wooden shed, from which several negroes hurriedly appeared. A moment later, the travellers, having left the coach, were seated in a tramway car—a real tramway car, exactly like those that in Paris pass between the Madeleine and Courbevoie; with a small platform before and behind, and a driver standing up, and flicking with his whip the two mules that he drove tandemwise. The rails were made of wood instead of iron. And the carriage rolled over them with a dull, almost an ominous sound.

If Valville had been less preoccupied, or Eusèbe less fatigued, each of them might have been struck with so curious a contrast; on the one side stood Nature in all her wildness, with her strange plants and savage animals; on the other, at only a few leagues' distance, a progressive civilisation which, little by little, was conquering the land.

As they approached the town, Eusèbe could not repress a cry of delight.

He had just perceived, on the banks of the Matanzas, which was crossed by a wooden bridge, one of those charming cities which have been built by northern tourists, almost surrounded by lovely woods. Civilisation and social life lay before him.

He was full of childish astonishment when, upon entering the suburbs, he saw an old negress seated beside a rickety table selling coffee; while a little negro-boy, who carried a basket of dates upon his head, regarded her with envious eyes.

"Hurrah for America!" Eusèbe exclaimed.

"Wait," said Ned Bark smiling. "You will have surprises still!"

Eusèbe thought of the crocodile and the snake, made a little grimace, and was silent.

CHAPTER XI.

NED BARK'S PREDICTION.

IT was about eight o'clock in the evening when our five friends made their entrance, behind two mules, in St. Augustine, the oldest town of the United States.

As they entered the city joyous bursts of military music filled the air. An artillery regiment was parading before the windows of the St. John's Hotel, and on the balconies stood a well-dressed crowd of sightseers.

As soon as they had reached the portico of the hotel, Freedy ordered a meal to be prepared for them in a private room. As for Eusèbe, he asked leave to go and lie down at once.

Valville himself was exhausted with fatigue, and Ned Bark, knowing that new exertions would soon be required of him, insisted that he also should go and rest.

Freedy and the detective remained by themselves. They had long been accustomed to similar expeditions, and they wanted to converse together for a time alone.

"Let us speak freely," said Freedy. "There is no one here now who needs encouragement, and whom we are afraid of depressing. So any beating about the bush would be absurd. Ned, what do you think of our situation?"

Ned was silent for a few moments, and then replied. "You know better than anybody, doctor," he said, "that nothing can be done but by earthly means, and that sorcery and witchcraft are out of date. Well, we cannot hide from ourselves that our enemies have great advantages over us. They can watch us, and spy out all our movements; and nothing ought to surprise us less than an attack directed against us at the very moment when we least expect one."

"I have thought of that," said Freedy. "And I am astonished that we have reached this place without an obstacle."

"Oh, it is not in this part of the country, close to St. Augustine, that the robbers will dare to attack us. The civilising influence of the States is still felt here, and the Federal troops protect us. But we are not yet on the scene of action, and whichever direction we take south of Florida, we shall be left to ourselves, and shall be in the very midst of war, with its ambuscades and its treacheries. We may expect to be attacked by invisible enemies on every side."

"And yet we must do something!"

"Certainly. Don't suppose that I want to go back. But courage is not rashness, and if we can possibly bring about some equality of position between our own and the advantageous one occupied by our enemies, it will be by acting with the most extreme prudence."

"So be it; but do not forget that time is passing—that an unfortunate girl is in the hands of those wretches—and that every hour brings fresh peril to her!"

"I forget nothing : be sure of that. The death of that Indian who escaped us was a great misfortune ; but at any rate we have received a hint," and he pointed to the piece of bark, of which we have previously spoken, "which ought to serve us as a guide in the beginning of our search."

"It is very vague."

"Not so vague as you suppose."

At this point the waiter entered, and placed a small book before Ned Bark, who opened it at once.

It was a map of Florida. Ned spread it out upon the table, then, with his elbows on the paper, and his chin between his hands, he began most carefully to examine it.

Florida is a peninsula, long, but regular in shape, which measures from Tallahassee, the most northern point, to Cape Sable, about 300 miles.

Jacksonville and St. Augustine are the only places which have any right to the name of towns. Pilatka is only a large village, and New Smyrna, which is marked on the map as lying upon the eastern coast, consists merely of two houses.

The western coast is almost uninhabited.

It is only in the northern portion—about a fourth part of the whole territory—that civilisation has made any real progress.

Ned studied the map attentively. Freedy, standing behind him with his eyes also fixed upon the geographical symbols, tried in vain to divine the detective's thoughts. Suddenly the latter put his finger on

the map, on a certain spot a little to the right of Volusia.

"It is there," he said, "it is evidently there that Red Ralph has arranged a meeting with his accomplices."

"There?" said Freedy bending over the map. "But I do not see why. From the island of Anastasia to New Smyrna the coast seems to be a mere desert."

"You are right. It seems to be so. But I know that on that part of the coast the Spaniards formerly built important forts, the ruins of which still exist, and which serve only too often as places of refuge for Indians and bandits. I remember that after the Seminole war, a band of Indians managed to escape from Ocala. We pursued them energetically, and as we drew near the sea, we never doubted but that they could not possibly escape from us. Their only resources were to throw themselves into the waves, where they would have perished, or to surrender. We surrounded them in a cypress-grove about a mile from the coast, and, as we were resolved to finish the business, we crossed the marshes, the bind weeds, the bogs. . . ."

"Well?"

"Well! Of these Indians, who numbered more than thirty, not one was ever found in the cypress-grove: it seemed as if they had sunk into the ground. And, in fact, so they had. After beating the wood in all senses, sounding the ground, risking our lives a hundred times amongst the poisonous creatures which crawl about the unhealthy pools and decayed roots, we ended by discovering a sort of hole lined with stone, of the same

kind of which the walls of St. Augustine are built. It was the entrance to a subterranean cave. As we had no torches we could not search it. Besides, the officer in command dared not risk the lives of men in his charge in a place where they would have been entirely at the Indians' mercy. They escaped us."

"Why did you not explore the subterranean place afterwards?"

"It was done the week following. But the Indians had partly destroyed it, and it was with great difficulty that we penetrated even to five yards from the opening. We found out only that the cave extended as far as the ruins of an old Spanish fort, destroyed long ago by sea and tempest."

"And you think that we shall find Red Ralph there?"

"There, or in a similar place."

"But, by your own account, how are we to get to it?"

"We must decide how to-morrow. In the morning I will make inquiries. Either from the officers or the policemen I shall obtain—I am sure I shall—some information about the movements of the Indians and of Red Ralph, and I shall find a way of action."

"Just so," said Freedy. "You know, Ned, we have complete confidence in you. . . ."

"Even Mr. Valville?" asked the detective, smiling, for he had not forgotten the young man's early distrust of him.

"I assure you, Ned Bark," said the doctor gravely, "that he knows how to value your energy and your devotion. One word more before we separate. What

do you think of that young man, Eusèbe, whom you found in so extraordinary a manner? He is a thoughtless fellow, not very strong, and I fear that he will be a burden to us rather than a help."

"Who knows?" said Ned.

"Do you mean to attach him to our party?"

"Why not?" said the detective. "The harebrained fellow has really shown some resolution in coming all the way from Europe, and the position in which I found him proved that he did not want for courage; and then," said Ned, laughing, "is there not a proverb which says that 'Providence takes care of children and fools'? Chance will serve him better than it does us perhaps."

"I accept the omen," said Freedy.

And with these last words the two men parted.

But Ned Bark, in whom it appeared that Eusèbe had excited some interest, did not expect that his prediction was so soon to be fulfilled.

When Eusèbe awoke, after a heavy sleep of ten hours' length, he rubbed his eyes, tried to collect his thoughts, and naturally—according to the custom from time immemorial in all respectable dramas—asked himself the question: "Where am I?"

The comfortable room made him smile to himself, and he stretched out his arms with a thrill of satisfaction. But suddenly he started. This slight movement had been immediately followed by a heavy thud, as if some hard body had fallen to the ground.

Eusèbe remained motionless. He had been dreaming of rattle-snakes, alligators, and other interesting but

hungry creatures, and the first thought that now occurred to him was that a new specimen of the Floridan fauna was about to bid him welcome.

He would have liked to produce some small joke, but an overwhelming sensation of doubt and dread effectually closed his mouth. He had interviewed certain animals of Florida under auspices which did not render continued intercourse with them particularly desirable.

He held his breath and listened with starting eyes. Nothing. The wild beast—if wild beast it were—was so quiet that our hero began to regain courage, and at the end of a few minutes ventured to turn round and examine with his eyes the space enclosed by the four walls of his room.

The curtains were not quite closed. Eusèbe had been too anxious to get into bed the night before to take any precautions for his own safety; he had even forgotten to bolt his door.

Between the curtains, then, a ray of light glided in and rested on the floor. In this white faint gleam Eusèbe could see an object of an oblong shape and greenish-brown colour. A slight shiver ran down his spinal column. Certainly the thing was not very big, so perhaps the danger was not great. But Eusèbe loved not the unknown. He was soon disgusted. And whatever could that thing be?

Concentrating all his visual faculties upon the said object, Eusèbe remarked that it was clothed in a rough skin, something like shagreen: that it had no feet, and

no head. He recurred to his profound acquaintance with natural history. If it should be a tortoise, were there any square tortoises? When he was at school he had kept one for six months in his desk, religiously feeding it on lettuces obtained from a greengrocer's shop. But this tortoise—which he had called Héloïse—was oval, like all other tortoises.

It would have been much better if, instead of indulging in these somewhat lengthy reflections, he had jumped out of bed, and marched straight up to the enemy. Blame him if you like. At any rate he found out at last that a bell-rope was fastened to his bedstead, and he pulled it violently.

A negro entered the room.

Relinquishing all linguistic attempts, Eusèbe pointed to the object on the floor, and said in French :

“Take that away, negro.” . . .

The negro did not need to be told twice. He picked up the thing, put it on Eusèbe's bed, and retired.

Ouf! Eusèbe turned pale. He shouted :

“Idiot! Fool! Take it off!”

But the negro was gone. The animal—*monstrum horrendum*—was there at his side. Oh, he would not look : he recoiled from it as far as the wall would permit.

Yet he must resolve on some mode of action. Eusèbe shut his eyes, and instinctively guessing the precise position in which the thing lay, pushed it off the bed with a violent kick.

There was a fall and a rustle, as of paper. Eusèbe came to the edge of the bed, and leaned forward anxiously.

The thing had opened, and a host of green and white papers were escaping from its side. Eusèbe burst into a roar of laughter.

"A pocket-book!" he cried.

And with one bound he was on the floor. Yes, it was nothing but that: a pocket-book of dark-green leather, with pockets full of greenbacks and bank-notes. Assuredly Eusèbe was well satisfied with this conclusion, but he was none the less surprised. He knew better than any one else that since his encounter with the excellent Captain Cotraw he had not possessed a shilling, and it was impossible to suppose that American hotel-keepers had the delicate consideration to supply their guests with pocket-money.

A note which he found in one of the folds of the pocket-book explained the puzzle.

"*MY DEAR BROTHER-IN-LAW,*" Valville had written; "I do not want to awake you. But as I know that you have no money, I hope you will accept a small loan from me. I am going on a search with Ned Bark and Freedy, and we shall be back in about five hours. Be prudent. Yours,—CHARLES."

"Come! here's a good fellow," murmured Eusèbe to himself. "Little sissy has been lucky! such a brother-in-law ought to make a capital husband. Let me see. I have all the day to myself. I must go and explore the country in that nice get-up!"

For, with the boots that the snake had invaded, the captain's coat, and his own much-damaged trousers, Eusèbe would not have cut a very fine figure on the

Boulevard des Italiens, in Paris. But a man must be brave ; so Eusèbe, although he grumbled, proceeded to dress himself, daring not, however, to look at his own reflection in the glass.

On his arrival downstairs he consumed with a significant grimace a breakfast chiefly composed of vegetables boiled in water, without salt or butter. When he had finished this deplorable repast he took his fishing-rod, which figured as a stick, or rather as a formidable club, and launched out into the streets of St. Augustine.

“Oh, what a wretched place !” he growled at every step. “And how dilapidated it is ! The architect ought to be kicked out. What hovels ! And there’s a man who thinks no end of himself because he’s a Spaniard ! And there’s another without either guitar or castanets. So much for the Spaniard of picture-books.”

Thus arranging his notes of travel, Eusèbe went hither and thither by chance, when, as he was crossing the market-place, he experienced a sudden shock of surprise.

And this was why.

A few yards before him walked a negro of the deepest dye, who twisted and turned and gave himself the most extraordinary airs. Eusèbe could see his thick lips, the whites of his eyes, his fleece of crisped wool ; but these were not the things that aroused his attention.

No : what astonished him beyond all expression—and indeed the most phlegmatic person might have been impressed by it—was the clothing of the said

negro. Fancy a little coat, cut in a fashion that made your mouth water to look at ! And the stylish trousers, falling straight to the ankle, and there expanding gracefully, so that only the tip of the boot was visible ; and on the head a perfect love of a little hat, not bigger than the palm of one's hand !

The coat and trousers were of a bluish grey colour, as delicate as the tint on a dove's neck ! He knew them by heart ! he had chosen them himself, with his own hand, and in Paris !

Were there in St. Augustine, in Florida—fifteen hundred leagues from Paris, that paradise of dandies—were there drapers who sold these works of art, workmen to cut them out, and tailors to fit them on ? Was such a miracle possible ?

Eusèbe did not hesitate to reply in the negative. Was it a miracle ? No ! Was it a mystery ? Yes ! But what was the mystery ? It was the work of a moment for Eusèbe to walk up to the negro, plant himself before him with his club in his hand, and execute a flourish with his right arm which did credit to his fencing-master, as he cried—

“ You black thief ! where did you steal those things ? ”

The ruling characteristic of a negro is not precisely courage. Moreover, this negro had been in the service of a planter at New Orleans, and understood a little French ; so when he caught the words ‘thief’ and ‘steal,’ he trembled from head to foot and began to whine :—

“ Massa, me no thief ! me swear . . . ”

Eusèbe, now quite beside himself, seized him by the lovely necktie, of the colour of stewed haricot beans with blue spots ; an ideal necktie !

"Where did you find these things ? Where ? where ? where ?"

"Me not found ! massa, pardon : not hurt poor nigger."

"You not stolen ? you not found ?" said Eusèbe, speaking the negro tongue in perfection—which proves once more how easy languages are to learn. "Then, who gave them to you ?"

"Not gave—massa, me swear ! Bought ! me bought them !"

Eusèbe's fingers relaxed their hold.

"Bought !" he cried. "Where ? Come, tell me, or I'll strangle you again !"

"But, massa ! there—in the market ! me paid !"

Eusebe took out a five-dollar note and spread it before the negro's eyes.

"You know that ?" he asked.

"Oh yes, massa !" said the negro, turning purple with pleasure.

"And you know that too ?" said Eusebe, showing him his club. "Well, you choose ! you take me where you buy that, or me kill you ! Eh ! it's clear enough, isn't it, you fellow ?"

The negro did not require to be told twice. Making a sign to Eusèbe to follow him, he led him through crooked narrow alleys, where the balconies of the houses nearly touched each other, and looked like drunkards

leaning on one another's shoulders. But Eusèbe was not at all afraid. He would have gone anywhere with his guide. They reached at last a sort of shed, under which could be seen a crowd of negroes, while a man on the table shook out various garments, offered them for sale, and shouted their price with all the strength of his lungs.

"Here, you take!" said Eusèbe, who had turned exceedingly red, as he put the five dollars into the negro's hands.

And while the descendant of Ham expended his strength in thanks, Eusèbe, making play with his elbows like a woman who wants to see the fireworks at a show, pressed through the negro ranks, reached the table, jumped upon it at one bound, and seized the merchant by the collar.

"Ah, it is you! you dog of a Queue-de-Rat! You shall pay for this. No! Then you'll get a first-rate thrashing!"

Yes, it was Captain Cotraw himself, with his enormous breadth of shoulder and bony face! And he was selling to the negroes of Florida the contents of the thirty-three boxes, which were there pell-mell.

But more comical than anything was the way in which this formidable-looking gentleman received as sound a box on the ear as ever resounded on the cheek of a clown at fair time. Without any loss of time he received another of equal force from the same quarter. And yet he did not knock Eusèbe down with one blow of his gigantic fists! Perhaps he had not time to do so, for Eusèbe thumped and thumped so long and so well that the worthy Queue-de-

Rat, confounded, overwhelmed, half killed, went head over heels to the ground. The negroes laughed and squalled. Queue-de-Rat tried to escape. But Eusèbe was now quite a Hercules, and held his prize so securely that the other could not move a step.

" You'll confess that you are a robber !" cried Eusèbe ; " and that all this belongs to me ! "

" If you will only let me go," entreated Captain Cotraw.

" Not before you—you yourself, mind—have put all these things into a trunk and carried them on your own thieving shoulders to my hotel. Come now ! quick about it, or I will have you put into prison, you gallows' bird ! "

Cotraw did what he was ordered to do. He did not seem to wish for any further public exposure, but obeyed implicitly ; and enough of Eusèbe's things were found to fill three boxes. There were coats, shirts, trousers, hats : quite a collection of different articles of clothing.

Cotraw made evident haste. He hailed two negroes.

And Eusèbe, walking behind, with his stick in his hand, conducted the triumphal procession to the hotel, where everything was safely deposited.

" Go, and be hanged somewhere else !" he said to the thief.

Cotraw asked for nothing better, and departed amidst shouts of laughter and cries of derision. It is needless to say that throughout all this uproar the police were conspicuous by their absence.

But if ever a conqueror was delighted, transported,

enchanted, that conqueror was our friend Eusèbe. He cared little for the thousand or fifteen hundred francs of which Cotraw had cozened him, as long as he possessed these delicious clothes ! In five minutes, Eusèbe issued from the hotel in a short coat of red and green tartan, and sky-blue trousers, in which he perambulated the streets of St. Augustine, convinced that he was stealing every woman's heart.

He kept the club in his hand, by way of precaution, however.

But he was so delighted, so feverish with joy and excitement, that, wishful to display himself everywhere, he lost his way, turned to the right, to the left, backwards and forwards, until at last he found himself outside the town.

But what did that matter, when he was so well dressed ?

Besides, he knew his way back again, did he not ? He saw in the distance a wooden building, and persuaded himself that it belonged to the town. It was an old mill, worked by a little waterfall, which leaped down and expanded below the wheel into a clear pond. Eusèbe advanced to it, and stood upon the bank. There, beneath the clear waters, he saw some truly magnificent fish ; and a thought occurred to him. What a success it would be, if that evening he could bring one of those splendid creatures to the hotel, where they ate cabbages boiled in water ! Had he not with him a fishing-rod that had cost nearly fifteen hundred francs ?

He screwed it together, and then, erect and in a fine attitude, with eager eye, he threw the line into the water.

But, alas ! a very robust creature took the hook into its mouth. Eusèbe was not expecting a bite so soon ; and the shock he received made him nearly lose his balance. In the effort not to fall, he relinquished his hold alike on line and fish. What a misfortune was this ! After all, what did it matter, when he was so perfectly well dressed ?

It was true that he had quite lost his way ; that in regaining the bank near the mill he saw nothing on the right hand or on the left, that seemed likely to guide him to St. Augustine. But then he was so proud of his tartan coat ; so satisfied with his trousers—particularly with the trousers !

So he went straight on, thinking that Providence would surely befriend a young man so exceedingly well dressed.

But there were cross roads and hills before him. Which of these roads would lead him to St. Augustine ? He began to walk a little faster. He consulted his chronometer, which had never been contaminated by the touch of a Captain Cotraw, and saw that it was four o'clock ; and dinner was to be at six. He began to feel hungry. Then, another and more worthy anxiety seized upon him. He feared lest Valville and Freedy should come to a sudden decision, and be hindered in their departure by his absence. He had some good in him, this little exquisite, so he set off running like a hare.

Suddenly, after climbing a steep rock from which he hoped to see something which should indicate to him the direction of St. Augustine, he found himself at the

top of a narrow defile, which ran between two rocks rising straight and bare from either side.

"This is the Hölle Strasse, in little!" exclaimed Eusèbe, who had visited the Black Forest with a circular ticket.

So saying, he missed his footing, and would certainly have rolled into the abyss, but for a hand that seized his own, and dragged him back to safety.

It was a negro's hand. Nothing but negroes!

"Ah! where am I?" exclaimed Eusèbe, addressing himself to this individual.

The negro rolled his big eyes and replied:

"Me not know . . . you ask . . . there; people down there."

Eusèbe bent down, and perceived in the ravine a group of four or five persons who were walking in the shadow of the rocks by the light of a lantern.

Two ladies went first, and Eusèbe could just see that they were armed with guns.

"These are heroines of romance!" he exclaimed. "That's perfect, and will suit me exactly. Me get down," he added, turning to the negro.

"Sambo take you down," replied the black man.

Two minutes later, having managed to descend by a precipitous pathway, Eusèbe arrived at the bottom of the ravine, and exclaimed—

"Saperlipopette! Alice! and the Woman with the iron will!"

CHAPTER XII.

EUSÈBE AS CAPTAIN.

DECIDEDLY Eusèbe was the man for adventures !

But his surprise was nothing to that of his aunt and Alice Lodier : for it was indeed these two who had presented themselves so suddenly before him. His delight was, however, so great, that with a burst of thoroughly Parisian sentiment he threw himself upon his sister's neck, kissed her on both cheeks, and repeated again and again in a voice that was choked with something very like a sob :

“ Oh, I am so glad to see you, dear little Alice ! ”

Then, without leaving her time to answer, he proceeded :

“ But this is most extraordinary ! how did you come here ? you, and the strong-minded woman, in the middle of Florida ! For we are in Florida, you know.”

His geographical acquirements were of too recent date not to be made the most of.

“ We are quite aware of it,” said Alice, smiling. “ But you—how did you get here ? ”

“ Oh, I ! ” said Eusèbe, swallowing down his emotion. “ It is quite an epic : Offenbach ought to set it to music ! ”

"Come, children," Madame Longpré interrupted them; "it seems to me that you will have plenty of time to talk, and that we ought to get to St. Augustine as soon as possible. . . ."

"Where my sister will meet some persons of her acquaintance—whom perhaps she will be glad to see."

"M. Valville?"

"Exactly! M. Valville, and Freedy, and the spy—no, the one-eyed detective."

"Mr. Ned Bark? You are right, aunt," said Alice; "we must make haste; and let us for once congratulate ourselves on having obeyed the inspiration that brought us here."

"Oh, I am never wrong!" said Madame Longpré. "When we heard—all that did hear, I said at once, 'Let us set off!'"

"And I obeyed, as usual," said Alice, exchanging a glance with Eusèbe.

She then turned to the guides, and requested them to lead them as quickly as possible to St. Augustine.

"Guides!" exclaimed Eusèbe, shrugging his shoulders. "How very pitiful! Did I ever need a guide? I? I! who came all the way from Havre by myself! And if I liked; could I not take you straight to St. Augustine? But I'll leave you to it! Come, Alice, I bet that your famous guide, who has a very hang-dog look, will go to the right!"

They had arrived at a sort of cross road, from which two paths lay in precisely opposite directions.

The guide, whom Eusèbe thought doubtless the worst of characters, hastened to turn to the left.

"That's the one I meant," murmured Eusèbe apologetically.

Then, thinking it better to change the subject, he turned to Alice, who had taken his arm and given him the gun she had been carrying.

"Come, sissy," he said, "tell me your little adventures. You must confess that for a brother who is not a block, and who prides himself upon his sensibility, there is something rather surprising in the sudden apparition of a sister armed from head to foot like a huntress, in an ugly ravine, too, which would be a disgrace to our worst decorators. Tell me everything."

"That is soon done," said Alice. "M. Valville left us in the care of an excellent man, a planter of Louisiana, a Mr. Woodman."

"What names they have in this country!" growled Eusèbe.

"And in spite of our anxiety, we intended to await his return, when an unforeseen occurrence changed all our plans."

"Ah! there was an unforeseen occurrence. I love that sort of thing. It is just like a novel when the word 'suddenly' occurs!"

"But your curiosity will have to remain unsatisfied," said Alice.

"Bah! why?"

"Because," said Alice, lowering her voice, "we must be prudent, and I do not trust the guides."

"But you are speaking French?"

"I distrust them, nevertheless, and I should be very sorry to risk by any imprudence of mine the success of the enterprise upon which M. Valville and his friends are engaged. But you shall hear everything by and by, when we reach St. Augustine."

"Well! I am still very anxious to hear everything."

"This unforeseen occurrence—having happened, it was most important that M. Valville should immediately be informed of it."

"Well! And the telegraph? Or is that only for crocodiles in this country?"

"A telegram might be intercepted."

"The deuce!—you seem to know all about it!"

"Mr. Woodman was not well; and I should not in any case have liked him to leave dear Lucile. . . ."

"Lucile! what's that?"

"What's that! Lucile, Monsieur Eusèbe, is a very charming girl—worth all your—what shall I say?—all your Parisian young ladies!"

"We'll allow her to be an angel! there! What else?"

"She is M. Valville's sister; and the sister, too, of poor Jeanne who has disappeared."

"All honour to unfortunate valour! Good. Finally, Miss Alice Lodier, if I am not the greatest of asses, was not sorry to have a pretext for going in search of M. Charles Valville!"

"Eusèbe!"

"So she hastened—on account of unforeseen occur

rences—to set out upon her way. But why did Miss Alice Lodier bend her steps—as they say in a comic opera—towards the honourable Spanish city of St. Augustine?"

"Because we were told to address all letters and telegrams to M. Valville thither, in case of need."

"Really! he thought then that you might telegraph?"

"Missis—St. Augustine," said Sambo, approaching them, and pointing to the town, which could be faintly seen through the gathering twilight.

This interruption was not distasteful to Alice, who had blushed a little at her inability to answer Eusèbe's impertinent observation.

She told him that at Picolata they had not been able to procure carriages, and had therefore been obliged to provide themselves with guides to show them the way on foot.

In a short time they entered the town, and soon reached the St. John's Hotel. Eusèbe, who at last had found his way, was delighted to act as guide.

It was now nearly six o'clock. None of the three men had yet returned to the hotel.

"Oh, no need to be anxious," said Eusèbe; "with Ned Bark and Freedy, they are sure to fall on their feet."

Alice and Madame Longpré retired to their room in order to rearrange their somewhat disordered toilette, while Eusèbe installed himself at the door of the hotel, smoked a cigar, and waited for something new to happen.

In fact he began to be greatly amused with the events around him. He found everything great fun. It seemed to him as if he were witnessing a play, full of catastrophes and recognitions of the most sensational character. Only the music was wanting. He would have liked a few songs.

Freedy arrived first ; and, on seeing Eusèbe, asked abruptly,

“Where is Valville ?”

“I have not seen him.”

“And Ned Bark ?”

“I have not seen him either.”

Freedy made use of a purely American expletive.

Just as Eusèbe opened his lips to tell him the news, Ned Bark appeared in his turn.

“Where's Valville ?” he also asked.

“He has not returned.”

A fresh ejaculation, more violent than ever.

“Well, what is the matter ?” asked Eusèbe, utterly nonplussed. “Anything wrong ? Sapristi ! this is a bad time for it.”

At that very instant Alice appeared on the steps. She had seen Freedy from her window, and never doubting but that Valville was with him, had run down to meet him.

“You ! you here ?” exclaimed Freedy, with a sort of anger. “And yet we begged you”

“To stay at the plantation,” Alice interrupted him. “When you know what brings us here, you will under-

stand why we were obliged to come. But," she added, "I don't see Charles . . . M. Valville."

"And, by Jove, no more do I!" said Freedy, more moved than he wished to show. "I would give my right hand to see him here."

Alice turned as pale as if she had been struck to the heart.

"What!" she said. "Have you any reason for anxiety?"

Freedy and Ned Bark exchanged a quick glance, and were silent.

"Gentlemen," said Alice, in a firm tone, "I am the promised wife of M. Valville, and I beg you to tell me the truth, whatever it may be."

"Let us go in," said Freedy sharply, turning to the hotel.

They entered a private sitting-room, and then Freedy addressed himself to Alice.

"You ought never to have come, for here we have everything to fear from our enemies."

"But Charles? speak!"

"I fear he has been drawn into a snare."

"Charles?"

"Listen to the facts. Ever since the morning we have been searching St. Augustine and its suburbs, in the hope of discovering some information which should put us on the track of the ruffians whom we are pursuing. But our endeavours were fruitless. For one moment only were we separated. Ned Bark went to see the metropolitan police, I to visit an old filibuster who might

have been able to help us, Charles to inquire at the post-office and telegraph-office whether anything was waiting there for him. Just as I left the house which I had visited, a negro approached me, and asked if I were Doctor Freedy.

"Upon my answering in the affirmative, he gave me a note, which consisted of these words written with a pencil in French :

"'I think I am on the track. Don't be anxious. Till this evening.'"

"Yes, that is indeed his writing," said Alice, who had glanced at the note. "But did you not question the negro?"

"Certainly, for my suspicions were at once excited. And what the negro told me only increased them. He had met Valville on the ramparts near Fort Marion. He was not alone, but accompanied by a person whom the negro described to me as one of the men whom we call 'carpet-baggers,' that is, adventurers capable of anything bad. Unfortunately, Charles has been absent from this country too long to be sufficiently on his guard against these rascals. They went in the direction of the open country. What can have happened? How can Charles, whom I have so often begged to be prudent, have allowed himself to be deceived by offers, promises, perhaps by mere lies! It is what I cannot understand. I met Ned Bark and he was of the same opinion as myself."

"M. Valville has fallen into some snare prepared for him by our enemies," said the detective.

"We must go to his help!" exclaimed Alice.

Freedy shook his head.

"Certainly, that is our intention! But the country round St. Augustine is broken up by cypress-swamps, woods, almost impenetrable thickets, and I fear that we may only arrive too late."

"What does that matter?" said Alice, carried away by her excitement. "Our duty is plain. Let us set off immediately."

"What! you, Mademoiselle?"

"Have I not told you that I love him, and that henceforward I consider that I bear his name?"

"Quite the right style, sissy!" said Eusèbe. "I agree with you: let us set off! see if I won't get him out of this mess."

Eusèbe was growing quite heroic.

In a few moments the four were ready to start.

Madame Longpré had, as usual, allowed herself to be persuaded, and authorised Alice to go without her. Eusèbe took with him a cane, which he had found in one of his recovered boxes: a little work of art, with a head representing a barking dog.

As he forgot to take arms, he had to be reminded to do so; but he flatly refused to be separated from his cane, which he brandished in one hand, while with the other he retained his hold upon the gun which rested on his shoulder. Ned Bark hastened to order the horses: for above everything it was necessary to gain ground. When they had left the

beaten pathway, it would be time to abandon the animals.

Alice had fastened up her hair beneath a sort of fisherman's cap, which was not likely to be carried off by the wind.

The little troop consisted of five persons, including Sambo.

At this moment the moon was rising, and shone brilliantly down upon the city of St. Augustine.

"You seem to bring us good fortune," said Ned Bark to Eusèbe.

"Ah! yes, I think I have a good chance of it," said Eusèbe with the air of a little conqueror.

They sprang to their saddles, and the horses set off at a gallop.

Ned Bark acted as their guide. He replied very evasively to the questions that were occasionally addressed to him. He trusted to his own detective-instinct. For half an hour not a word was uttered; each ear was on the alert; and Freedy kept close to Alice's side, fearing some ambuscade, but without daring to avow his fear.

The road that they had taken led to the river Matanzas.

The moon shone so brightly that one might have imagined its light to be that of noonday. The nights in Florida often retain this exquisite clearness. The smallest objects are visible, light colours and shadows are defined with perfect exactitude, and work is often not suspended until the night is far advanced.

At a distance of about two hours' journey from St. Augustine they perceived two men felling a tree in the midst of a clearing. Ned Bark gave orders that the travellers should halt, and slipped down from his horse.

A hut had been built against the trunk of a palm-tree, and a bright fire burned upon the ground.

Ned Bark advanced towards the two men and questioned them.

They made no difficulty about answering him, and he learned that three riders had passed down that road about an hour before.

"One of the three was a Frenchman," said one of the labourers.

"How could you tell that?" asked Ned Bark. "Did you speak to him?"

"Not I," said the man, laughing; "but he spoke to his horse; and, you know, we don't use the same words in speaking to animals."

"That's true," said the detective. "And where do you think they went?"

"That would be hard to say. This road has no precise object; in about three hours' time it loses itself in the cypress groves, which extend as far as the river Matanzas."

"And they went so fast," said the other, "that one might have thought they would take the distance over the sea to Anastasia at a single leap."

When Ned Bark returned to his companions his face wore a more sombre expression than ever. He could on longer doubt but that Valville had been carried off

by some of Red Ralph's emissaries. There was nothing, however, to indicate that he was treated as a prisoner ; so he must voluntarily have followed his worst enemies. What promises had he made to them ? With what hopes had they lured him ? How had Charles allowed himself to be deceived ? These were questions which must all remain unanswered.

But he had obtained one piece of valuable information : the road was cut short by cypress swamps. Possibly, by quickening the trot of their own horses, they might yet catch up the others, whose progress could not be very rapid.

" Forward ! " Ned Bark exclaimed.

And at a touch of the spur the horses dashed forward at their utmost speed.

In one hour they had crossed the space that separated them from the cypress groves. So far they had been threatened by no danger ; on the other hand, they had also received no new information. Ned Bark asked himself if he were really on the right scent.

Before adventuring themselves in the labyrinth of cypresses, they were forced to dismount. They were consulting together as to whether they should content themselves with merely tying the horses to trees—a measure doubly dangerous on account alike of venomous reptiles and of horse-stealers — when Ned suddenly raised his head. He had just noticed a strange and regular sound, as of monotonously falling strokes.

They were then in the midst of a sort of ravine, one side of which was formed of white stone, like chalk,

fully illuminated by the brilliant rays of the moon. Ned Bark turned the corner of the rock, and saw some blackish buildings propped up against it on the other side. It was an old sawmill, turned by means of a stream of water that issued from the rock. Negroes were still working in the moonlight, and a negro woman was kneading cakes of Indian corn.

Ned Bark did not hesitate. He addressed himself at once to the negroes, and easily obtained shelter for his horses.

These exiles from the rest of the world had noticed neither horses nor riders ; but Ned heard that by turning the flank of the chalky cliff he would find himself on the edge of the river Matanzas.

Was it in this direction, then, that Valville had been conducted ?

A sort of council of war was held. Ned, supported by Sambo's opinion, declared, after close examination, that nobody had entered the cypress grove for a long time, as there was not a single trace of footsteps.

But upon examining the soil more carefully, which the exceptional beauty of the night rendered it easy for them to do, they were soon convinced that the marks of footsteps were indeed visible in the direction of the river-bank.

There were no traces of horses' hoofs.

The riders had doubtless left their steeds in some nook where the little troop could not be noticed by passers-by.

The ground gradually sloped down to the edge of the river.

Suddenly Eusèbe uttered a cry.

"Sapristi ! down there ! Look ! "

Their eyes followed the direction indicated by his hand, and they saw a boat gliding swiftly down the current, impelled by rapid rowers.

The river Matanzas, which divides the Island of Anastasia from the mainland, is nearly three-quarters of a mile broad, but it is dotted over with smaller islands which intercept the view.

The boat moved with great rapidity. It could not preserve a straight course, as its progress was constantly impeded by currents.

"And there is a boat doing nothing !" cried Eusèbe.
"Let us get in."

He was right. A boat, furnished with oars, lay on the sand.

There was no need to hesitate. The four men pushed off the boat, which in a few seconds was afloat.

Alice, whose courage did not fail her for a single moment, placed herself at the stern. The men seized the oars.

"Shove off !" ejaculated Eusèbe. "This is like the regatta at Argenteuil. Let us show these fellows what it is to be a water-dog of the Seine ! Off ! Time, boys!"

Thus did Eusèbe constitute himself captain of the vessel. He feared nothing. If America had been there to conquer, he would have felt capable of conquering it single-handed.

The oars dipped, and the boat shot forward like an arrow from a bow.

"One, two! One, two!" said Eusèbe. "No nervousness now! Don't hurry the time! One, two!"

But the other boat had had a considerable start of them, and now appeared about to disappear in the maze of islands which dotted the watery plain.

In vain did the four companions redouble their efforts; they saw the boat hide itself completely behind a screen of earth and trees.

"Sapristi!" cried Eusèbe. "This is not child's play!"

Still they would not abandon their pursuit. The oarsmen were strong; but the current was rapid, and they were not sufficiently well acquainted with the dangers of the river. Twice their keel became entirely entangled in water-plants, and several minutes were lost in disengaging it.

And this was not all; for the moon was sinking rapidly, and darkness fast coming on. Alice, wringing her hands, felt with despair her impotence to defend or save the man for whom she would gladly have given her life.

They succeeded in coasting round the island behind which the boat had disappeared. But the night had become so dark that it was impossible to distinguish anything. It was useless to continue the pursuit.

"He is lost! he is lost!" murmured Alice.

"No, no, little one!" exclaimed Eusèbe. "Have I

not been through enough difficulty and danger? I, who have conversed with crocodiles in charge of a large family, and snakes which invaded. . . .”

“Alligators and snakes are less dangerous than men,” said Ned Bark, shaking his head.

“Get along with you, wet blanket!” cried Eusèbe. “Do you, too, want to dishearten her? I tell you that we shall soon find her Charles for her, as fresh as a rose!”

He was rewarded for his encouraging speech by a gentle pressure of the hand.

“After all,” said Ned Bark, “I am never discouraged, so I will not begin to be so to-day. Doctor Freedy, what do you think of the situation?”

“In my opinion,” said the doctor, “this is what we ought to do: approach one of these islands, and moor the boat fast to the bank. Then wrap ourselves well up, and spend the night there. To-morrow, when the sun rises, we can carefully examine the place, and think what we must do.”

“That would be the most prudent course,” said Ned Bark. “And if Miss Alice has no objection. . . .”

“I am ready for anything,” said the girl in a grave voice.

They took Freedy’s advice, and in a few moments the boat was moored in a little creek in the bank of one of the islands.

There they spent the long and dreary night.

No one slept; yet not a word was interchanged.

What was happening? What fate was reserved for Charles Valville?

"Daylight!" exclaimed Eusèbe at last.

And in fact, a whitish tinge seemed to pervade the whole atmosphere.

But at the same instant, as if his cry had been a signal, the report of guns rang out upon the silence.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT ANASTASIA.

"Do you hear?" exclaimed Alice. "They are murdering him!"

"Come, a Frenchman is not killed quite so easily!" said Eusèbe. "To arms, friends!"

The four men had already seized their oars.

In the deep silence of early morning the reports had been so distinct that it was easy to guess from what quarter they had proceeded.

Even had the listeners hesitated, a fresh succession of shots resounding in the distance might have served them as a guide.

The first explosion had been produced by several shots fired at once. But now single reports were heard at intervals, and it seemed as if the sounds drew nearer and nearer to the shore.

As they rapidly noted these facts, the rowers quickened their strokes, and the boat shot through the water with incredible swiftness.

Now that day had broken, they could see that beyond the islets that had served them as a shelter for the night, the course of the river was unimpeded as far as the coast

of Anastasia, which was some two miles distant from them.

Above the clumps of trees upon the bank they saw a tiny cloud of smoke.

“Courage!” exclaimed Alice, who was standing upright in the stern of the boat. She had seized a gun, and laid her finger on the trigger.

Eusèbe jested no longer, for he felt, as indeed did also his companions, that a decisive moment was approaching. The boat cut its way through the current, under the impulse given to it by vigorous hands, straight to the shore. In a few moments they would reach it.

But at that very moment they beheld a terrible sight.

A man was running towards them, tearing his way through the tangled bind-weeds, while, at a short distance behind him, two forms could be seen standing upon a slight elevation with guns upon their shoulders, evidently waiting until he should reappear from beneath the trees in order to give him a mortal wound.

“Bloody Foot!” cried Freedy. “Oh, let us show no pity this time!”

And snatching the gun from Alice’s hands, he rose up in his turn, saying :

“Ship your oars! Let her drift!”

And for a few seconds the boat, obeying the impulse already given, glided on steadily.

Charles—for it was indeed he whom the men were waylaying—had just issued from the wood. Before him lay an open space, which he began to cross.

A shot was heard.

One of the Redskins flung out his arms and fell forward.

But at the same instant the other fired at Valville. Did the ball strike him? They saw the young man stagger on for a few paces, then fall into the moving flood.

Had his friends arrived too late?

In the terrible silent waiting that followed, one might have heard their hearts beat with the agony of suspense.

But the voice of Sambo cried out—

“Here!—to the left!—in the water! massa’s son!”

In the direction indicated a dark form could now be seen. They rowed towards it, and Ned Bark, leaning half-way out of the boat, seized Charles Valville by his clothes.

It was Valville himself, but exhausted, bleeding; and so pale that Alice thought at first they had saved only a dead man after all.

She fell on her knees in the boat, and supported with both hands the head of the man whom she loved to call her husband.

“Alice!” he murmured in a feeble voice. “Alice!”

“He is living,” said Alice.

And indeed it seemed as if love—true, deep, earnest love—had worked a new miracle. Yes, Charles was living, for the blood rushed to his face; he seized Alice’s hands and pressed them to his lips as he returned her look of affection.

Meanwhile the boat, directed by the rowers, had

reached the shore of the island of Anastasia: a wild coast strewn with fragments, which told a tale of many a tempest-driven bark wrecked upon the inhospitable shore.

"Freedy," said Ned Bark, "give your best care to the wounded man. I and Sambo are going in chase."

"Prudence above everything!" exclaimed Freedy.

But the detective and the negro, gun in hand, were already crossing the cypress grove. Ned Bark had chosen his destination beforehand. It was the mound upon which Freedy's piercing eyes had recognised the Indian, Bloody Foot. He had fallen, struck by a ball, but did he still live? Could not some last confession yet be wrested from his lips?

This hope was disappointed. The Seminole was motionless: Freedy's ball had seemingly penetrated his heart. He had fallen face downwards, with a slight foam upon his mouth.

But he had not been alone. What had become of his accomplice—the wretch who had fired at Charles Valville?

From the height where he stood, Ned Bark could survey the whole extent of the long and narrow island of Anastasia. No vestige of a human being could there be traced.

They walked round the hill. Both uttered at the same time a cry of anger. For, a few yards only from the western coast, they saw a small sloop, rigged like a cutter, moving off from the shore with all sails set.

And, as if to prevent their doubting for a moment that the sloop was affording a means of escape to their

enemies, a man, the very Redskin whom they were seeking, had plunged into the water, grasped a rope thrown to him from the vessel, and gained the deck.

With a furious exclamation, Ned Bark discharged his gun after them; but the distance was already too great for the shot to have any effect. The cutter sped rapidly upon its way.

Ned Bark returned to Bloody Foot, seized, perhaps, with a hope that his first examination had deceived him. Sambo, understanding his intention, preceded him. While Ned Bark was still examining the place, the negro bent over the Indian. He found him stretched close to the edge of a fissure in the rock, which divided it as completely as if it had been severed by one stroke of a giant's sword.

Suddenly the arms of the Seminole moved and seized the negro by the neck, while the wretched man writhed upon the ground and dragged his prisoner to the abyss. Taken utterly by surprise, powerless to disengage himself, Sambo's chance of escape was as nothing. The Seminole was dying, but in dying he attempted a last revenge. His attack had been so sudden, that Ned Bark, who at that moment was directing a parting glance of anger at the cutter, did not even hear the negro's stifled cry. When he turned round, he saw Sambo suspended over the gulf, retaining his hold merely upon a frail root which his hands had grasped convulsively, while Bloody Foot was pressing him downwards with the whole force of his body. Ned ran forward, and drawing a revolver from his belt, applied

it to the Indian's head. He fired. At the same moment Ned seized Sambo's arm, and with one vigorous effort restored him to safety upon the surface of the rock.

A dull sound could be heard. The Seminole's body rebounded as it fell from rock to rock. Then one last thud: then—nothing. Their terrible enemy was no longer to be feared.

Sambo bent down before the detective, took his hand and kissed it. Ned was more moved than he liked to show. He raised Sambo from the ground with a show of brusqueness, and said :

"We have nothing more to do here. Let us go and find our friends."

As he spoke, Eusèbe appeared.

"Well, what's the matter?" he cried. "You seem to be having nice little games without us!"

"Where have you left Mr. Valville?"

"A few yards off; he is lying on a bed of leaves. Oh, there's nothing to be afraid of. That scoundrel's ball only grazed his shoulder. He's going on like a house on fire!"

And as Ned Bark and Sambo approached, they saw Charles actually standing upright, still pale, but with eyes sparkling.

"Ah, Mr. Bark," said Valville, holding out his hand; "I know what you have done for us!"

"Don't talk of that," said the detective. "Well? speak out—are you wounded?"

"A mere nothing," answered Freedy. "One dressing will suffice."

"In that case," said Ned, "we have no time to lose."

And he recounted to them what he had seen.

" You only can tell us, Valville, who the men are that are escaping in that cutter."

" Those men," said Charles, " consist of Red Ralph and his band of assassins."

" I was sure of it!" cried Ned. " Why have I not that robber at the mouth of my gun! But you have yet to tell us why you were so imprudent—you will forgive the word, I hope—as to leave us and go off on a wild-goose search!"

" You shall hear everything," said Charles. " But pray believe that the man employed very powerful means in order to entrap me into this snare. And, above all, don't think it useless to search their hiding-place. Who knows but they may have left behind some sign which will put us on their track?"

" Their hiding-place?" said Ned, in surprise. " What do you mean?"

" I was taken there myself: to an old deserted building . . ."

" Singular! I saw no sign of it."

" Oh, the place is well hidden. But follow me, and I think we shall find it again."

The little band set out upon their way.

Alice, supremely happy, took Valville's arm. She had been easily pardoned for her disobedience to the order that she should remain at the Woodman plantation.

But as yet she refused to answer the questions, with which they plied her, as to the motives which had caused her to leave her dwelling-place so unexpectedly.

"I will tell you all," she repeated. "But I want to know what has happened already. The news that I bring will be really important only if it agrees with what you have heard yourselves."

The island of Anastasia was, in the last century, one of the strongest fortresses possessed by the Spaniards, its uneven ground adapting it admirably for purposes of defence. Traces of ditches and fortifications could still be seen. And after passing through the tangled wood which formed, as it were, a thick curtain upon the western coast, one reached a sort of high wall cut out of the solid rock, against which the sea, as yet invisible, dashed with terrible violence in waves that expended themselves in showers of foam and spray.

Upon the summit of this enormous natural embankment some wooden buildings—once probably used as a guard-house—seemed to hang over the abyss beneath.

"It was there that those men took me," said Charles, pointing to this erection.

"But I do not see any means of scaling the height," said Freedy.

"Wait. If we go round the base of the cliff we shall see a sort of lake, fed by small streams from the sea. There we shall find a wooden bridge, which leads to a stair cut in the face of the rock"

But he interrupted himself suddenly.

"The wretches!" he exclaimed. "They have cut down the bridge before leaving the island!"

There was a moment's hesitation.

But the fine gentleman, Eusèbe, who had hitherto

kept silence, now threw off the nicely-coloured coat which enwrapped his graceful form, valiantly pushed up his sleeves to the elbow, and hurrying to the edge of the lake, where he had noticed the trunks of some great trees, seized one in his arms, and cried—

“ If there isn’t a bridge, we’ll make one, that’s all ! ”

He was right. Before them lay far more wood than was necessary to make a temporary footway. They set themselves to work at once. At a short distance from the waterfall they found a comparatively narrow portion of the lake. Sambo worked in the water; and in less than half-an-hour the six persons had crossed the foaming flood, and found themselves at the foot of the staircase of which Valville had spoken.

“ Attention ! ” said Ned Bark. “ Have your guns ready.”

They ascended the steps slowly, every sense on the alert. When they had attained the summit of the rocky wall, an involuntary cry of admiration escaped their lips. Below them the mighty ocean stretched away into the far distance. The waves burst furiously upon this vestige of Spanish power, still strong and massive enough to resist the continual incursions of the sea.

The wooden building was of more recent construction. No doubt it had been erected during the late civil war, and had served as a beacon to the ships which blockaded the north of Florida. Now it was nothing but a haunt for robbers or birds of prey.

“ Here we are ! ” said Valville, who was walking first.

Following the course of the embankment, he had reached a wooden staircase, and, having ascended it, he

pushed open a mouldering door which gave entrance to a large room, where they found several traces of the recent bivouac of a band of men. A fire, still alight, shed a red gleam upon a wide, solidly-built hearth and fireplace.

The men began to search the premises, leaving no corner unexplored. But it was only too evident that the bandits had made a clearance.

"Listen to me," said Valville, when they found themselves once more collected in the room which they had entered first, and which contained several seats; "listen to me, and I will tell you the history of my strange and dangerous adventure.

"When, at St. Augustine, I left Freedy and Ned Bark, I went, as you will remember, to the post-office. I was wrong there, perhaps, in not taking any precautions when I asked for letters and gave my name. As I came out of the office, I was accosted by a tall personage, wrapped in a cloak, who asked me, in a most polite manner, if my name were not Charles Valville.

"Upon my replying in the affirmative, he continued—

"'Pardon me, sir, for taking this liberty; but I know that you are visiting Florida for grave reasons, and if you will consent to trust me, I can make important revelations.'

"I am young, my dear friends," said Charles, interrupting the course of his story for a moment. "I ought to have refused to listen to this man, but the mysterious tone in which his words were uttered provoked my curiosity. I followed him—the more readily

because he spoke of the crime committed at Battle Field, and of Jeanne's disappearance. And when—with a last gleam of sense—I asked him what interest he had in giving me such information, and he answered, 'That is very easily explained: you are rich, and will pay me well,' I felt that nothing could be more logical. But still he refused to give me immediately the information that I expected. He explained to me that he, with others of his companions, formed part of the band of which Red Ralph was chief. He had not taken part in the crimes of Battle Field, but he had heard all about them. Since that time, he and his friends had had reason to complain of their chief, and had resolved to sell the secrets which they had discovered. But, as these men were naturally suspicious one of the other, they had resolved never to reveal these secrets except in presence of all the members of their confederation.

"All this seemed to me very plausible. Then my sister's name, uttered several times, threw me into a sort of fever. I consented to everything. We left the town, found horses outside it, and galloped off. What road did we follow? I do not know, and I am still surprised that you could recover any traces of me. We found a boat on the river-bank. Two men were already there, who seemed to be waiting for us. At last we arrived at this island and took the way that I have shown you, and I was led into the very room where we are sitting now.

"But scarcely had I entered it, when I understood that I had been tricked, and that my life was in danger.

"A dozen bandits, armed to the teeth, occupied the room, and amongst them I remarked two Indians.

"I was silent, waiting until one of the villains should inform me of what my fate was to be, when a door opened, and another individual appeared: a man of very high stature and stern features, with a face which bore an expression of savage energy.

"I do not know what instinct told me that my father's murderer stood before me, but, carried away by rage, I cried out—

"'You are Red Ralph! Curse you!'

"And although I was unarmed, I threw myself upon him. But at the same instant twenty hands were laid upon me, and reduced me to powerlessness.

"'Since you know my name,' said the man, with a sneer, 'there is no need for an introduction. You were looking for me, and you have found me sooner than you expected. Your first expression was one of anger. I hope, nevertheless, that we shall yet understand each other better; and to show you that I wish to make the first steps towards reconciliation'—here he turned to the men who were holding me—'set Mr. Valville at liberty.'

"The hands that had seized me were removed. I remained calm and motionless. I had had time for reflection. What would be the use of violence? And now that I found myself face to face with my enemy, ought I not, above everything, to learn his designs?

"'I will listen to you,' I said, looking him full in the face. 'Only remember that there stands here a murderer and a judge, and that I am the judge.'

"A strange contraction passed over the robber's brow, but he preserved his calmness.

"And now," continued Charles, "I beg of you, my friends, however improbable my story may appear to you, to give it your entire belief. I will not weary you with the interruptions which I made to the extraordinary ravings of the wretched man, and I will repeat to you the mere substance of his words.

"He spoke gently, and I must say that his manner was that of a man far superior to the atrocious trade which he had made his own.

"'Mr. Valville,' he said, 'I am a criminal, and I acknowledge it. But know, that not only did I never soil my hands with your father's blood, but I saved the life of Miss Lucile, Jeanne's sister, and yours. What I will not hide from you is that I directed the expedition against your father's plantation, but for what purpose? You shall know all. I love your sister; I love her madly, passionately. I went to her in all truth and honour, and said, "Be mine, and I will make you the happiest of wives."

"Here a livid pallor overspread his face. With a gesture and a few words he ordered his companions to retire. Alone with me, he approached me, and spoke in a voice that came forth with a hissing sound from between his closed teeth.

"'To all my vows of love your sister replied by hate and disdain. Then I went mad. I said that in spite of her, in spite of all, she should be mine. That is why, Charles Valville, I burnt your father's

plantation. That is why your sister is now in my power.'

"You will understand, my friends, with what difficulty I contained myself. When he had finished, I crossed my arms on my breast, and said—

"Then you dare to tell me that you have used violence. . . ."

"No! no!" he cried, "I give you my word that I have treated your sister with every respect. She repulses me, she hates me, she despises me, always! Well—do you know why you are here? Because Miss Valville said to me not long ago with that disdainful smile which cuts me to the heart:—"On the day when my brother consents to the marriage, I will be your wife!" Do you understand that I might have made her obey me? But no! I love her. I, Red Ralph—the outlaw and the robber—I bend to her will—I submit to her! It must seem almost impossible to you. And yet it is the truth. So far, my reverence for her has been unimpaired. But take care!" he added with concentrated rage, "all patience ends in time!—And, Mr Charles Valville, I come to ask for your consent—for the command which your sister waits for—and I will do everything to obtain it."

"I was stupefied. There appeared to be in this man an inexplicable mixture of greatness and baseness, of humility and ferocity, which overpowered me.

"And if I refuse to obey you?"

"Then," he said, with a burst of rage, "you are in my power, and I shall kill you!"

"Kill me, then!"

"But the wretched man threw himself at my feet, begging and imploring me to grant his request. Time passed on; and a hope seized me—I know not why—that I should yet be saved. He said at last—

"Listen, you do not know who I am. You think you see in me merely the robber Red Ralph. But I bear one of the names most honoured in America, for I am Ralph Staunton."

"As you may well imagine, I remained immovable. Ralph was then attacked by a fit of rage, which seemed to be almost epileptic in character. At his orders I was seized and cast into a sort of dungeon attached to this room. Hours passed on; I asked myself whether the ruffian had not condemned me to that most horrible of deaths—the death of lonely starvation. Suddenly I perceived that there was an ill-closed opening in my cell, the side of which was level with the face of the rock. I called all my courage to my aid, and attempted an escape which only half succeeded, for I was seen at the very moment when I had reached the bottom of the wall, and pursued immediately. You know the rest.

"Oh, my sister!" Charles continued, "my poor sister is lost for ever! Who can tell me where I shall find her, or how I shall snatch her from that ruffian's hands?"

Then Alice Lodier rose and said—

"Take courage, Charles. I can tell you where your sister is."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE REVELATION.

"You asked me," said Alice, whose face had assumed an expression of gravity which contrasted strongly with the gentle and delicate character of its features ; "you asked me why I came here ; why, in opposition to your instructions, and more, in defiance of your wishes, I left Mr. Woodman's plantation, bringing with me my aunt, that kind-hearted woman whom I thus exposed to danger and fatigue. I will not believe that you, M. Valville, supposed that I was simply following a childish caprice. . . ."

Charles protested with a look. Was he not grateful to her for coming, and for illuminating with her smile the darkness which surrounded all his steps ?

"I only wished first to make you understand," said Alice, "that I would have respected your wishes, if there had not been grave reasons for my acting otherwise ; and you shall judge of them yourself."

"I never doubted you, Alice."

"Thank you. And I feared to give you a momentary hope which might soon be found a mere illusion. It was for this reason that I so long kept silence."

"What do you mean?" cried Charles.

"I fear that if I tell you plainly what I know and what I think I know, you may conceive hopes which a single word will perhaps destroy."

"Go on, for heaven's sake!"

"Mr. Ned Bark," said Alice, turning to the detective, "you are acquainted with the southern coast of Florida?"

"Yes, Miss Lodier. I can affirm that there is not a single creek or opening which is not well known to me."

"Then tell me—speak freely. Have you ever heard of a place which is called . . . ?"

She hesitated, as if she feared a negative answer from the American.

"Go on," said Ned Bark. "I think I know every place on the coast. And yet, in the midst of so many out-of-the-way names, one may have escaped my memory."

Alice conquered her emotion, which proceeded simply from the feeling of fear that we have mentioned; made an effort and continued in a grave tone—

"Do you know a place on the coast called Devil's Rock?"

"Devil's Rock!" exclaimed Ned Bark. "Certainly; and all the coasters along Florida know it too: an enormous cliff, which in foggy weather is almost lost in clouds."

"Ah! Devil's Rock does exist, then?" said Alice, with a cry of joy.

"Does it exist! Go and ask the ships which have

been dashed against that rock by the high tides and destructive tempests of the Atlantic ! Too often those who do not know it learn its existence in their latest hour!"

" It is a dangerous rock, then ? "

" Devil's Rock," said Ned Bark, " derives its name not only from the imposing majesty of its gloomy form as it rises above the waves, but also from a special characteristic which makes it the terror of those who navigate the seas in its vicinity."

" Go on ! go on !" murmured Alice, whose face expressed deep perplexity.

" Well ! the Devil's Rock stands on the coast, about twenty miles from here, and is a great black mass. You, Doctor Freedy, who have travelled in America, you have seen the sombre ravines of our Black Forest, on each side of which rise enormous walls of rock ? One of the rocks of which this Devil's Rock is composed looks like a gigantic monolith : the other, only like a detached portion of it. But what seems to us so strange is that in calm weather Devil's Rock appears to be more than a mile inland ; but when the sea is high, the water gains on the earth more rapidly than in the highest tide, and rolls up, dashing and foaming to the very base of these rocks. More than one cutter has been seized by this inexplicable whirlpool and dashed to pieces against Devil's Rock ! The rising sun has too often shone down upon broken spars and mangled human bodies at the foot of the cliff. I know this for a certainty. That is why I tell you that Devil's Rock is perhaps the most dangerous spot upon the coast of Florida."

"But why do you ask for this information, dear Alice?" cried Valville. "Do not play with my impatience! If you only knew the fever that consumes me!"

"Dear Charles," said Alice, "do not think that I act in this manner without good reason. I want to preserve you from sorrow, that is to say, from disappointed hopes. And that is why, if Mr. Bark will allow me, I will ask him another question."

"I am at your orders, miss," said the detective, bowing.

"Listen, and, before answering me, consider that upon your reply depends the whole campaign on which you have entered against the enemies of Mr. Valville's father—of him whom I also should have called my father!"

"Speak, miss."

"Could the rock of which you speak be used as a refuge for robbers?"

"Certainly," replied Ned Bark. "As I have explored almost all this part of the country, I know that the ocean has hollowed out caverns in the very heart of the cliff. I cannot call them subterranean places, as some of these retreats are a hundred feet above the level of the sea, but there are holes, vaults, grottoes—I can answer for that."

"Then I may speak," said Alice. "But forgive me, Charles," she added, turning to Valville; "I would not for the whole world have aroused in you hopes that were only to be dashed to the ground."

"Go on!"

"It is not I who will speak."

So saying, Alice took from her pocket-book a letter which she handed to Valville.

"I came," she said, "to bring you this letter from your sister. Read it, but, I beg you, weigh every word carefully, and, above all, be calm."

Valville was very pale. In his young and essentially sensitive nature all emotions assumed singular keenness. Alice knew him well when she refused to speak until she was sure that the story which she had brought him might at least possibly be true.

Charles took the letter with a trembling hand, and for some moments gazed at it as if he doubted whether his own name, there inscribed, had indeed been written by his sister's hand.

At last, upon an energetic sign from Ned Bark, he made an effort and broke the seal. His eyes were dim, and he was obliged to draw his hand across his forehead before he could decipher the characters, traced as they were in singularly large and clear handwriting.

"The best plan would be to read it aloud," said Ned Bark; "if, at least, Miss Lodier will allow us to do so," he interrupted himself, turning to Alice.

"You are right," she said. "In that manner you can all judge, and decide with more certainty as to the measures which ought to be taken."

"I will read it," said Valville.

He made a great effort to prevent his voice from trembling, and began the letter.

"Dear brother," Lucile's letter began, "another will bring you the news which I was the first to hear. But my wound has not yet healed, and gives me far too much pain at present to allow me to think of joining you."

"The ruffians!" murmured Freedy with compressed lips.

Valville imposed silence on him with a gesture, and then continued to read:—

"But I know that she whom you have chosen for your companion is brave, and that you love her with all your heart. It is to her then that I entrust these lines, certain that I cannot place them in better hands.

"I will tell you in detail all that happened. For before launching out on an adventurous expedition, where your life and the lives of our friends would be in danger, you should be able to weigh for yourselves every reason for and against it."

At the words 'our friends' Freedy smiled in spite of himself.

Doctor Freedy was a man of essentially phlegmatic temperament. But there is a time when almost every man, however impassive he may think himself to be, is conquered by an emotion which takes possession of his whole being.

Thus Freedy, sceptical and impassive as he pretended to be, had lately discovered that he loved with all his soul the young girl who had proved herself so pure and so simple in her heroism, whom he had first met at her father's house, and had not seen again until

the moment when, after a miraculous escape from a horrible death, she had forgotten herself in thought for those she loved.

"This is what has happened," began Charles, as he continued to read his sister's letter. "Every day we expected some letter or telegram from you, to tell us that you were at last on the track of the wretches whom you were pursuing, and that above all—oh! above everything—you had some hope of finding our dearest Jeanne. Even when the postman's hour had long passed by, I could not make up my mind to despair, and waited on and on! Yesterday, almost ill with fever, which proceeded rather from over-excitement than from my own physical weakness, I could not sleep; and, wishing to cool my burning head, I opened the window which fronts the cascade at the end of the park.

"The moon shone brilliantly, and through the cactus and magnolia groves I could easily distinguish the smallest turnings in the paths, while my ears were filled with the monotonous sound made by the water as it dashed upon the rocks.

"Suddenly I started. It seemed to me that I heard a footstep upon the ground below. I do not think I am timid, but since the terrible events which terminated in my father's death and in Jeanne's disappearance, I have often found myself trembling, and unable to conquer a feeling of uncalled-for terror. My voice seemed to die away in my throat. I bent forward and gazed in silence. Suddenly I saw—though at first I thought it was a mere fancy on my part—a black form appear from

behind one of the clumps of trees. I was nailed to my place with terror, and could neither move nor say a single word. The shadow approached—crawling—dragging itself, until it was almost close to the house. At that moment, though scarcely able to articulate, I managed to call out, ‘Who goes there?’ The form stopped suddenly, and, to my great surprise, I saw that it knelt down and extended its hands in the direction from which my voice proceeded. No mistake was possible ; the unknown had assumed a suppliant attitude ; and, moreover—I could hardly believe it, and yet I was sure that I could not be mistaken—the man staggered as though he were at the very point of death.

“It never occurred to me that I might fall into a trap. I do not know what instinct told me that I ought to go straight to the stranger ; that he had come in order to speak to me in private ; but as rapidly as possible I stole out of my room, descended the stairs, and gained the park. The man had made only a few steps forward. When he heard the sound of my steps, he raised his head, and I saw his face very plainly by the light of the moon.

“I could scarcely repress a cry of surprise and also terror, for I recognised a negro, once set free by my father, named Biji, who had disappeared with the assassins of Battle Field.

“He recognised me also, for he touched his forehead in token of respect.

“‘Missis,’ he said, ‘come to me, pray. I am dying, but I must speak first.’

"'What do you want with me?' I asked shortly. 'How is it you dare to appear at this place again? you, an accomplice of my father's murderers!'

"'Yes, I am a villain,' he said. 'And you cannot forgive me—yet I tell you I am dying—have pity on me, and I repeat it, listen to what I have come to say. I have come to tell you where Miss Jeanne is. . . .'

"At this name all my doubt and terror disappeared.

"'Jeanne!' I exclaimed. 'Oh, speak! and if you do not deceive me I will pity you.'

"'It is indeed the truth which you will soon know.'

"He had sunk to the earth, and I now saw that he was trying to raise himself in order to lean against the trunk of a tree.

"I helped him, and he thanked me.

"'You are good,' he said. 'I did well to come.'

"'You say that you are dying. What is the matter with you?'

"'Look here,' said the negro, and he lifted his hands to his head, and parted the thick tufts of his woolly hair.

"I leaned over him and shuddered. The poor man's head was laid open in a gaping red wound.

"'But who wounded you so terribly?'

"'Who? The ruffian, the robber, the coward—Red Ralph himself.'

"And over the negro's face passed a convulsive grin of fury and vengeance.

"'Speak!' I cried.

"'I will, missis. Yes, it is true that this man came

to the plantation ; he promised if we would help him that we should have plenty of money, enough to let us live without working—the dream of us poor negroes, you know—help him to carry off Miss Jeanne. He did not speak of murder ; he swore that no blood should be shed ; I and several of my companions consented to listen to him. You know the rest ; but I swear that I myself never touched a hair of your father's head !'

" ' Go on,' I said, ' I believe you.'

" ' The young lady was carried off, and we rode fast all night. We were guided by Indians, Seminoles, with Bloody Foot at their head. There was Sam Dorry, the New Orleans thief, and Phil Samster, who set fire to the Docks. Long, very long, we remained at a distance from any inhabited place—it matters little how we reached the borders of Florida at last.'

" ' But Jeanne, my sister ! ' I exclaimed. ' Did she not sink under such frightful fatigue ? '

" ' No, no ; do not be alarmed. Ah ! she is a brave girl ! really, it seemed sometimes as though Red Ralph were in her power. He trembled before her ; she spoke plainly, she insulted him ; he bent his head and did not answer. Still we had to watch every moment to prevent her escape ; at night we built a hut for her, into which Ralph never dared penetrate, but round which we kept strict guard. At last we came to the St. John's River ; and followed its course along the western bank as far as Pilatka, where we turned ; and from that spot we entered upon ravines only known to the Indians, where it seemed as if no human being had ever trod before us. We thus

arrived at the foot of a rock on the seashore. We were astonished, and could not understand the aim of our journey when our guides began to climb the rock by an almost perpendicular pathway. Between the clefts in the rock trunks of trees had been thrown to form bridges, on which one could scarcely stand upright; and finally, at more than a hundred feet above the sea, we entered a series of natural caverns, which had long served as hiding-places to the bandits. It was there that your sister was detained. We guarded her by relays, day after day. In vain did Red Ralph—we heard him distinctly—beg her to listen to him, to submit to him; always disdainful, always self-possessed, she repulsed him with contemptuous words. I have been very guilty! yet, little by little, repentance gained upon me; I admired and pitied the girl who had never done me harm, and for whom the danger grew greater day by day.'

"He stopped, and fell into a sort of swoon. I ran to the cascade, brought him some water in the hollow of my hand, and bathed his temples with it. He revived, and thanked me with a smile, which sat strangely on the pale lips of a dying man.

"'One night,' he continued, 'I saw Red Ralph steal towards that part of the cave where your sister was sleeping. It was I who watched, gun in hand, with orders to kill her if she tried to escape. What happened I do not know, but suddenly I heard a cry for help! Obeying my better instincts I rushed forward; I seized Red Ralph by the throat, and threw him backwards on the ground.

How it was I did not kill him I do not know ; but a few moments later I was dragged off by the others—by those who had been my accomplices. They pushed me to the verge of the cliff which overhung the abyss, and there they threw me down—a frightful fall ! I felt the sharp corners of the rock cut my flesh—then came a last shock—then nothing more. How many hours I passed in that swoon I cannot tell. But when I came to myself I swore to repair the evil I had done. I swore to avenge myself upon Red Ralph ; and, dizzy as I was, staggering like a drunken man, I set off—it is a miracle that I got here at all—but here I am ! and I tell you, Miss Lucile, you must go to your sister's help ; she must be saved.'

"But the rock that you speak of, where is it ? what is its name ?'

"It is called Devil's Rock,' he answered.

"In an hour Biji was dead. I told everything to Mr. Woodman and to our dear Alice ; and as Mr. Woodman could not just then leave the plantation, and as I felt that I myself was too weak to brave the fatigues of the expedition, fearing that I should be a burden, and not a help, to you, I was in despair, until your Alice, Charles, accepted—nay, claimed the mission.

"What more shall I say, my dear brother ? With all my heart I pray for you and for Jeanne. Have confidence and courage ; and in the midst of danger, let you and yours not forget poor Lucile, who grieves so much at her absence from you all."

The reading of this letter was followed by a long

silence. All eyes were moist, all hearts touched by Lucile's simple words.

Eusèbe was the first to recover the use of his tongue.

"Well, she's been carried off, that is certain," he said.
"Don't stop to think about it; let us find the said rock.
It will be a nice affair! we shall have a hot time of it."

"What do you say, Ned Bark?" asked Freedy.

"What I say is, that the little one"—it was thus that he designated Eusèbe—"that the little one is right. Before forty-eight hours have passed we ought to be heading an attack on Devil's Rock."

"You know how to get there quickly?"

"I'll answer for that."

"Then let us go," said Charles. "And here I swear either to save my sister or to die for her!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE CRUSTACEAN.

IT was not easy to find at St. Augustine a vessel ready to start for the southern coast of Florida. The fishing-boats had already set out, and a week might elapse before their return.

Freedy and Valville were in despair, for well they knew that with each hour the danger increased. Half the day had already passed, when Ned Bark re-entered the hotel with a business-like air.

“Up with you!” he cried. “I can manage it.”

“At last!” said Charles, springing up with a cry of joy.

“But one remark beforehand,” said Ned. “I have had to play a part, and you must bear me out in it.”

“What do you mean?” asked Freedy. “It is an understood thing that we do not wish to let strangers into our secret.”

“Oh, if it were only that! But the schooner which I have discovered is not an ordinary one, particularly as regards the captain.”

“Explain.”

“This is the state of the case. As I explored the harbour, and questioned the sailors, one after the other,

I found at last a schooner, somewhat heavily built, but strong and fairly good for speed. Two or three men on the deck seemed to be making the last arrangements before setting sail. I asked what was their destination. They seemed amused at my question, but I repeated it. ‘Where we are going?’ said one of the sailors. ‘If you want to know that, you must ask the master.’ ‘Who is he?’ ‘A fool.’ Of course I did not content myself with that answer; and these are the facts which I gathered at last. The schooner, the ‘Tortoise,’ belongs to an Englishman, an eccentric naturalist, chemist, and physiologist, who, with three pupils, as little used to a seafaring life as himself, has been exploring the coasts of Florida for the last six months, in order to discover some animal or other which he wants for his collection. He has already spent thousands of dollars, and is ready to spend as many more; for he is, it appears, immensely rich, and is just setting off for the eighteenth time in the last twelvemonth to explore the coast as far as the Gulf of Mexico. After which, if he has not succeeded—if he has not found his monster, a sort of crab, I think—he will come back, quite ready to set off again in a fortnight.”

“He may be a fool or not,” said Charles; “at any rate he is a zealous servant of science. But will he consent to take us on board?”

“That is the question. But there is one way . . . ”

“What?”

“You must pretend to share the good fellow’s tastes.

I suppose you are both quite well able to play the part of scientific men ; you must go and see him and persuade him that you can help him in his efforts. When once we are off, we shall easily find means of making him stop at Devil's Rock."

"But if he should refuse ?"

"One must always be ready to take one's chance."

"Do you think that there is any likelihood of inducing him to take us on board ?"

"Yes, for I ventured upon the little fable that I have just mentioned to you, and he answered that if you had the same aim in view as himself he would have no objection to your company."

"Let us go and see him," said Charles resolutely. "Freedy, you may do the talking ; Nature has no secrets for you."

"And I ?" said Eusèbe, "what am I to do ?"

"Come with us," said Valville.

"I shall have to pass for your pupil, the assistant head-cook and bottle-washer !"

This arrangement being made, the three men, directed by Ned Bark, proceeded to the street where the naturalist resided.

Of our three travellers, two—Charles and Freedy—at least, might have appeared to be well steeled against any emotion or surprise. But they were not prepared for the sight which awaited them when they were ushered into a so-called study in which the naturalist, whose name was Cartwright, very politely received them.

The room was flagged and sanded, and the floor was nearly covered by scores of living creatures of the most curious shapes, which crawled forward, sideways, backward, climbed one over the other, stretched out their claws, and entangled them with those of their neighbours ; fought combats that Homer might have sung, and engaged in frightful battles that were worthy of an Iliad, with strange sounds of gliding and cracking of shells and scales. Round the room ran a shallow tank in which other guests were eating, sleeping, or fighting their lives away.

In the midst of this inferno of crabs—which Dante left undescribed—stood a crooked hunchbacked man, with a skin of parchment, and arms that were curiously like antennæ : a veritable crab in human shape, with great prominent eyes that seemed to be starting out of his head.

Eusèbe was livid with horror. This army of crustaceans seemed to him like a nightmare.

Cartwright had a crab in his left hand, a crab on his right leg, and a crab on his shoulder. In his right hand he held a magnifying-glass with which he had been examining the animal, that lay on its back, and held up its claws in the air as if in sign of protest.

“What is it you wish ?” asked Cartwright of Freedy.

The doctor had already recovered his self-possession. Then, to Eusèbe’s ever-growing surprise, he plunged into the midst of this chaos of crustaceans with a truly heroic courage ; and, taking the tone of a professor, he addressed the naturalist in a speech worthy of a scientific association.

"I see before me at last," he said, "a man who recognises how much there is of true beauty and grandeur in the study of brachyural decapods. I honour you; for here, sir, is the future of science, here the secret of nature. Yes," he added, uplifting one of the monstrous creatures, that flapped its claws wildly in the air, "here we may indeed behold the lobed crab of the Antilles, and there the rose-coloured crab of the Red Sea. And this one—what a splendid creature! Is it not an Australian crab? And surely, I do not deceive myself! What, sir, you have got an ocypodian, a gecarcinus, the robber, and the violet crabs! Would that I could give its weight in gold for this precious collection!"

The worthy Cartwright was in the seventh heaven of ecstasy. He regarded with a softened look his Pandemonium of crustacea. He smiled at the gelasimus, and made eyes at the gecarcinus.

Freedy was eloquent. Learnedly he set forth the reasons for his enthusiasm. The crab, rather than the retort of a chemist, contained within itself the true secret of creation! Even if one deprived it of its limbs, the amputated members would grow again! The crab was the king of animals; the crab was in fact divine!

He discoursed so long and so well that the man of crabs all but seized him in his arms—I nearly said his claws—and embraced him in delight. Freedy was then a fellow-student of crustacean lore? What did he want? Would he like a specimen of the rarer kinds?

"No, I have come to ask if you will allow us to share your labours and become your pupils."

"These gentlemen, then," said Cartwright, looking at Valville and Eusèbe, "have also been initiated into the mysteries. . . ."

At this very moment Eusèbe became conscious that two pointed claws were penetrating the skin of his ankle. He had, nevertheless, the strength of mind to smile like a Spartan and reply :

"I? Oh, I have always been fond of crab!"

Cartwright's resistance to Freedy's proposition was not of long duration, more particularly as Freedy's next piece of information overbore all his objections.

"They tell me," he whispered, "that you are looking for a little-known species—may I hear what it is?"

The naturalist shuddered slightly, and laid his hand over his eyes.

"You recall the memory of one of my sorrows, gentlemen," he murmured in a mournful tone. "For three years I have sought the spinomanus."

"The spinomanus!" exclaimed Freedy, "that is the crab with prickly claws, connected with the acanthus!"

"What! you know it?"

"We were at school together!" said Eusèbe in a low voice aside, with a furtive kick at the imprudent crustacean which had attacked his heel.

"Do I know it?" said Freedy. "Ah, Mr. Cartwright, how mysterious are the ways of Providence!"

"Tell me," said the naturalist, with a gasp.

"Sir, the spinomanus may be found a few miles from

St. Augustine, upon the coast, at the foot of a high cliff, popularly known as Devil's Rock."

"Great heavens! Let us start at once."

Freedy had gained the victory.

An hour later they all embarked on board the 'Tortoise.' Cartwright was so preoccupied that even when the six friends appeared—for Alice, Ned Bark, and Sambo had been added to the party—he never dreamt of feeling surprised that so many crab-lovers existed in the world! Sambo and Ned Bark hastened to bestow themselves in the hold of the schooner, in order to escape notice. Alice wore a dark dress, and was enveloped in a long cloak, which covered her whole figure.

At last the word of departure was given. The schooner was not built for speed, but it was of very solid construction. Freedy was already on intimate terms with Cartwright, who reposed every confidence in him, and, as his acquaintance with nautical matters was not large, soon committed the management of the schooner to his new friend.

The boat, under skilful handling, made rapid way through the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

Our friends were too anxious and in too great haste to attain their end to pay much attention to the fine scenery which they passed along the coast of Florida. Eusèbe was inexpressibly disgusted when once, in the middle of a meal, Cartwright calmly placed a jelly-fish upon his plate and examined it through a magnifying-glass.

In twenty hours from their departure the travellers found themselves near Devil's Rock. Night had fallen,

and in spite of their impatience they were forced to wait till daybreak before disembarking.

They were also obliged to use great precaution, as there was a heavy sea, and the ship might easily have been wrecked upon the enormous rocks that frowned upon the coast.

At last the little band landed upon a narrow strip of earth, above which frowned the gigantic masses of the Devil's Rock.

But when they gazed at the colossal wall of stone, cleft in twain by a great fissure, through which the waves dashed with a sound like thunder, it seemed to them a veritable madness to dream of attacking the bandits in their stronghold.

Where, moreover, could they find the robbers? In what direction should they go? Even to climb that rugged cliff appeared impossible!

And what was worse than anything to bear was Cartwright's despair when our friends were obliged to confess that they had tricked him, and that they had not the shadow of a wish to hunt the spinomanus.

Fortunately, the naturalist was a good-natured man, and a brave one too.

"Good heavens!" he said, when he heard their story, "then you cheated me? You shan't have the laugh against me, however!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I'll join your party; the crabs can wait. I put myself and my companions at your disposal; and if it comes to a bit of fighting, well, I'll prove to you that

one may be rather mad, and not want for courage or resolution either."

"I will find you the crab you seek!" exclaimed Freedy, with a burst of feeling. "I give you my word I will."

"First let us find the young lady," sighed the naturalist, who was now somewhat doubtful of his friend's good faith.

Meanwhile, Valville and Ned Bark had set out on a reconnoitering expedition. In order to escape notice from their enemies, they explored the base of the rock as stealthily as possible, clinging to the trunks of scattered trees, or to projecting pieces of granite; for they felt sure that a footpath must somewhere exist that would lead them to the robbers' cave.

The rest of the party hid themselves in a sort of grotto, which seemed to have been hollowed out by the action of the sea, and waited.

We have already said that day had scarcely dawned. The place seemed deserted; no sound could be heard but that produced by the breaking of the waves upon the rocks; a dull and dreary resonance re-echoed from the barren shore.

Suddenly Ned Bark stopped and turned to Valville.

"Up there, look!" he said.

At the same time, with the stick which had served to support his steps upon the slippery pathway, he pointed out to the young man a fissure in the rock, now gilded by the rays of early morning.

"Do you not see there," he said, "something like men's forms which seem to be ascending the cliff?"

"Indeed I do; and now they look as if they were hanging in mid-air, which shows that a ladder or staircase must exist there, and that they are mounting it."

Soon they could doubt no longer; there could be no mistake. The robbers were evidently returning to their hiding-place, and the travellers were at any rate on their track.

The two men returned hurriedly to their friends.

But as they approached they heard a cry. It was Eusèbe's voice.

"Ah, poor boy!" exclaimed Valville, "what misfortune can have happened to him now?"

In a few seconds they reached the cave, where they saw Sambo on the point of throwing himself into the sea, Eusèbe, always rash, had strayed beyond the border of stones which guarded the entrance to the grotto, and had then slipped and almost disappeared in a hole full of water. But Sambo at once jumped after him, and succeeded in bringing the young man to the surface.

"Sapristi!" cried Eusèbe, as he clambered up the bank, "that was a jump! Aie! whatever is that?"

"That" was something that had attached itself to his trousers, a something which was driving its claws into the fleshy portion of his leg.

But a second cry responded to his own.

"It's he! it's he! Oh, what luck! The spino-manus!"

And a strong hand detached an enormous crab from

Eusèbe's trousers, together with a piece of the material of which they were composed.

In an ecstasy of enthusiastic delight Cartwright continued to exclaim—

"Yes, the spinomanus indeed ! Oh, eternal bounty of Providence !"

Freedy had not deceived him after all, and the valiant naturalist, energetically brandishing his gun, declared that he could now die in peace !

For he had got the spinomanus ! In two minutes the very ugly creature was enclosed in a tin case, and confided to the care of one of Cartwright's pupils, who received it with the veneration usually accorded by a neophyte to a relic.

Ned Bark and Valville gave an account of what they had seen. Their plan of action was soon decided upon. The little troop was separated into two parties. Ned Bark, Freedy, Valville, and Cartwright were to scale the ladder ; while Eusèbe, Sambo, Alice, and the naturalist's pupils were to keep guard lest the robbers should escape them.

"Alice," said Valville, taking the girl's hand, "we are near the decisive moment. If I die, I confide to you the care of those whom I love."

"You will live, Charles ; I know, I feel you will. Our cause is just, and your sister will be restored to us."

"Forward !" said Freedy.

At first the two groups marched side by side, seeking for some suitable spot for the disposition of their reserve corps.

"Look," said Alice suddenly, "is that not a pathway?"

And certainly upon the side of the rock they could distinguish a winding outline.

"Well, you had better wait here," said Ned Bark. "Although that path seems to be almost impracticable, the ruffians will perhaps try to escape by it. Hide yourselves behind that point of rock, and there, gun in hand, wait for us. And now—Heaven help us all!"

The four friends regained the spot which they had searched a short time before. They began immediately to climb the rock, directing their course towards the ladders, which they could now distinguish much more clearly.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MYSTERY OF DEVIL'S ROCK.

As we have said, the four persons who had entered upon this perilous road were Ned Bark, Freedy, Valville, and the crab-lover Cartwright.

The two first-mentioned preceded the others.

"Ned," said Freedy, "this is no doubt the decisive moment. Do you augur well of our enterprise?"

The detective shook his head.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I have lost my bearings. My much-bepraised acuteness is all at fault. We have to do with so extraordinary a criminal!"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you not hear Miss Lucile's story as well as myself?"

"Well?"

"Well! did you not notice that just where we thought we had to do simply with political foes, avenging imaginary grievances on Mr. Valville, we were encountered by a strange wild passion, complicated by incredible weakness on the part of a man who has never hitherto recoiled from any sort of crime?"

"You mean Red Ralph?"

"Exactly so. You know this man belongs to a very good family, and although his insatiable ambition has dragged him far down the road of crime, I think that there is still a spark of noble feeling in him."

"But what has that to do with it?"

"It shows that we have no common adversary to deal with, and I doubt whether we shall succeed as quickly as we had hoped."

By this time the little party had reached the foot of the cliff, and its members were attentively gazing at the ladders of which we have spoken.

It seemed almost impossible to set foot upon them, placed as they were upon a dizzy height, from which they seemed to lose themselves in the distance.

By what means could they be attained?

Some time elapsed in fruitless search for the means of ascent. At last Cartwright, who for some time had been making the neighbouring rocks resound beneath repeated taps of his geological hammer, exclaimed suddenly—

"It sounds hollow. There is a cavern here."

"So be it!" said Ned. "But where is the entrance?"

"We can look for it."

And Cartwright persisted in affirming that upon the level of the first stratum of the rocks they would find the opening of a sort of natural tunnel. And he supported his opinion by pointing out the fact that a stream of water issued at that point from the very heart of the rock.

"Understand me," he said. "I am quite sure that

there is an opening up there, and that through that opening our enemies reach the ladders which we can see."

"Then what do you think we ought to do?"

"Climb up to the point from which the stream gushes out; once there, we can consult about our next movements."

"Come along then."

The method proposed by the crab-lover was certainly not easy to put into practice. As no beaten track existed, they were obliged to scale the rugged cliffs by means of jutting rocks or trunks of trees to which they clung, hanging at times above the abyss into which the slightest false step would have precipitated them.

Happily the four men were strong and agile, and the naturalist was not the least vigorous of the four. The strength of his arms was extraordinary. He clambered over the slippery stones in exactly the fashion of those decapods whom he had made his lifelong study—so true is it that men identify themselves at last with the creatures in whose habits they take continual interest.

As they were obliged to choose in their dangerous ascent only the points which offered some support for their hands and feet, they deviated little by little from the course which they had meant to take.

They lost sight of the opening whence the torrent issued, and which they thought might be the entrance of the cavern. Still they did not lose heart, but climbed on and on.

At last they emerged upon a sort of open plateau.

Valville, in his impatience, had scaled a rock which seemed almost inaccessible. Ned Bark was just behind him.

Charles advanced to the overhanging edge of the precipice and called out :

“Ned, don’t let the others come up !”

“What can you see ?” asked the detective.

“I can see the stream which we noticed before ; its source is obstructed by a great heap of wood.”

“Let me see too,” said Ned Bark.

And with marvellous courage, the detective—who, when the bargain was made at the plantation, had taken the risk of death into account—by the help of a bare pine-tree which lay upon the cliff and extended far beyond it into space, lay down, crept out as far as he could, and bent over the abyss.

“You are right,” he said to Charles, as he drew himself back.

He made a speaking-trumpet of his two hands, and shouted loudly to Freedy and Cartwright. Their voices answered him, saying that they could hear.

“Go no farther,” he said. “Turn to your right, and you will find a sort of natural staircase cut in the face of the rock. There : you have got it ; now climb !”

The two men obeyed his instructions. They thus reached a ridge of rock exactly opposite a large dark hole, to which, however, as Valville had said, entrance was forbidden by the mass of trunks and branches piled before it.

The ridge of rock was so narrow and so slippery that it was almost impossible to stand erect upon it.

"Wait!" cried Ned. And he called to Valville, who hastened to rejoin him.

Ned, always prudent, had compelled each of the travellers to provide himself with a long stout cord, which he wore coiled round the waist.

"This is what we had better do," said the detective. "We will throw these ropes down to them, so that they can fasten them to their own. And while we hold them fast, they can throw down those trunks of trees into the stream below, and thus force an entrance for us all."

Cartwright, accustomed to dangerous expeditions, had already thought of a similar plan. Once more climbing to the summit of the rock from which they had descended when they turned towards the ridge, he fastened two ropes to some trees which grew there. He then tied himself and Freedy together at their belts.

And when Ned and Valville had lowered the ropes with which they also were provided, Cartwright and Freedy were so securely fastened and supported that a fall was hardly possible.

"Now to work!" said Freedy.

He had thrown off his coat, and his sinewy form displayed itself in all its vigour beneath his well-fitting woollen shirt.

"You content yourself with directing the course of the wood," he said to Cartwright, "while I move it."

Then, seizing an enormous branch, he plunged it into the midst of the heap of wood, and, leaning forward,

gave it a tremendous shake. The weight to be removed was immense. But beneath a graceful exterior, Freedy concealed perfectly Herculean strength.

Beneath repeated thrusts the mass began to give way.

"Have a care, Cartwright!" he cried.

And the great branches, sliding and twisting, lost their balance and fell into the torrent. A frightful overthrow, a gigantic ruin then was seen. The pieces of wood dashed against the rocks and again rebounded, awaking in their fall a thousand echoes which seemed to resound throughout the whole extent of the mountain heights.

A dozen times was Freedy almost caught in the falling mass. A dozen times, at the risk of his own life, did Cartwright turn aside the course of the falling branch that might have crushed him; and in half an hour the ridge was clear from all obstruction, and before it yawned the fissure in the rock.

"Hurrah!" cried Freedy. "Now, come down, Ned and Valville, and let us boldly penetrate the depths of this inferno."

In an instant Ned and Charles were at his side.

Before they entered the cavern, Freedy said to the detective in a low voice:

"We are going to the unknown; for, to all appearance, this is not the way ordinarily used by the bandits."

"So much the better; we shall surprise them the more easily."

"Heaven grant it!" said Freedy, shaking his head.

They secured the ropes once more around their waists, and took up their guns, as well as the torches with which Ned had furnished them.

"Forward!" said Valville.

The torches were lighted, and the four friends plunged into the darkness of the cavern.

Cartwright had rightly inferred the existence of a cavern. The course of the torrent soon diverged and left the way free. But had this opening any other way of issue?

The slippery ground beneath their feet rose gently. By the smoky light of their torches they could see that the roof of the cavern was of considerable height. They could walk upright with ease; but as they advanced, and the ground still continued to rise, they were obliged to stoop, and finally to creep forward upon their hands and knees. Ned went first, backwards, with his torch held close to the ground, in order to give light to his companions. The air grew thick and foul, yet none of them dreamed of turning back.

But suddenly Ned's course was stayed. The cavern seemed to be completely closed by a wall of rock. After so many efforts they had traversed only a blind alley. At this point the roof was higher, and they recovered some freedom of movement.

But in vain they lighted their torches and gazed about them: the granite wall presented no way of issue.

"We have gone too far," said Ned. "Some cross-passage must have escaped us."

"Let us go back," said Freedy philosophically.

After several moments' consultation the friends agreed that this was their only resource. They would not be discouraged. They had resolved beforehand to sacrifice their lives rather than leave the mysteries of Devil's Rock still unexplained.

But just as they were about to retrace their steps Ned cried suddenly—

“Silence! Listen!”

And, curiously enough, they heard, at apparently an immense distance, the sound of voices. It seemed at first as if they issued from the very bowels of the earth; yet, by degrees, the sounds became more and more distinct.

The four men listened with feverish anxiety. Whence did these sounds proceed?

Cartwright, who never lost an opportunity of displaying his scientific knowledge, was already whispering an explanation of a phenomenon not unfrequently encountered in mountain-sides.

The rocks themselves transmitted sounds, often to a very great distance. The friends listened accordingly, and suddenly distinguished amidst the echoes the sound of a woman's voice.

“It is Jeanne's voice!” cried Valville, dashing himself like a madman against the wall.

The voice was high and vibrating. Although it was impossible to distinguish the words that were spoken, it was certain that they did not consist of cries for help or exclamations of terror. Their accent was imperious, almost solemn; but another voice—a man's voice—responded in threatening tones.

"I would risk my life to save my sister!" cried Charles. "Oh, let us not lose a minute! It may be our last chance!"

Possessed by the same idea, they hastened along the passage. Before very long Ned cried—

"There is the opening! Down there!"

And upon their left hand they saw a long passage, the entrance to which had been so well concealed by a projecting piece of rock that they had passed by without noticing it.

This passage was so narrow that they were obliged to go in single file.

This time Cartwright went first. He walked on hurriedly, expecting every moment to be brought up by some unassailable wall of rock.

The passage seemed to be a winding one. How long the minutes were to the four men! They heard nothing more, and yet they could not doubt but that Jeanne was in danger. She was there—at only a few steps' distance, perhaps—and they might arrive too late.

Valville's blood seemed to turn to ice in his veins at the very thought.

At last Cartwright exclaimed—

"Daylight! I can see daylight!"

And in fact a band of light could be seen at some distance from them beyond the shadows of the rocks. Pushing aside the naturalist, Charles sprang towards the opening. His friends saw him raise his gun to his shoulder, and almost immediately the sound of a shot rang through the cavern.

Ned joined him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Look there! the ladders!"

They were now above the great fissure in the rocks where the curious rope ladders were suspended which they had noticed that morning; and through a sort of fog they could dimly distinguish upon them certain human forms which seemed to be trying to escape.

"Don't fire!" cried Freedy. "You forget that your ball might strike your sister!"

He had forgotten that! Fully sure that the bandits were before him, he had fired, and seen one dark figure lose its hold and fall into the abyss.

Freedy's words awoke a frightful fear within him.

But without more delay the four friends began to descend the mountain-slope. They wished to reach the ladders at all risks, although it seemed as if everything had fallen back into its primitive condition of solitude and silence. Rapidly they made their way onwards till they arrived at a sort of amphitheatre hollowed out of the bare rock; before them stood a grotto, like the entrance to some magician's palace—a majestic-looking place of great size, supported on pillars that looked like bronze.

The four men entered it unhesitatingly.

They reached first a great hall, of prodigious height, in the middle of which a fire was still burning, as if to attest the recent presence of the robbers.

Beyond the hall the grotto was divided into a number of apartments, separated one from another by doors

adorned with hanging mats. In any other circumstances this retreat might have excited admiration, so beautifully had it been shaped by nature's hand.

Furious and desperate, Valville searched the rooms, calling loudly upon his sister's name. But no voice replied.

Followed by Ned, he entered at last a room which had evidently been furnished with some attempt at elegance. Silk hangings hid the walls; plaited mats, prettily arranged, formed a bed and seats; in the middle of the room a bamboo table supported a lamp, still alight.

"Look!" cried Charles, sadly.

Upon this table an unfinished piece of needlework lay in a work-basket. Doubt was now impossible. It was there indeed that Jeanne, his beloved sister, had been held prisoner. It was there indeed that her wretched lover had tormented her. It was thence that he had dragged her but a few moments earlier!

And she had escaped her brother's pursuit!

"But I will follow them!" cried Charles, almost beside himself with grief.

"Wait," said Ned Bark.

Guided by his keen instinct, the detective had at once set to work carefully to inspect every corner of the room, and he had just discovered on the ground a crumpled piece of paper, as if the girl, suddenly surprised, had thrown it away from her to let it fall where it would. Half of it had been torn away, but these lines still remained visible—

"I await
have been able so far
keeps me in his power
are seeking me ; he knows
rescue his victim. He will take me
overheard a few words interchanged between
he spoke of a
Louisiana
to understand
to Wood
help !"

And that was all!

In another moment the four friends had quitted the cavern, where all research was now useless.

An easy road led them to the rope ladder.

' But there a new disappointment awaited them. The fugitives had severed the ropes with blows from their hatchets. Their last hope was wrested from them. And Jeanne remained in the bandit's power !

It was with great difficulty that Valville and his companions regained the friends who were waiting for them. And even there they found only new sources of anxiety.

Nothing had been seen. Not one of the robbers had shown himself. But this was not all. Imprudent as ever, Eusèbe had quitted the little band more than an hour ago, and had not since returned.

In vain they searched the mountain-side ; in vain they called his name ! Eusèbe had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RETURN.

THE fragment of a letter found by Ned Bark and Vallive in the grotto which had served as poor Jeanne's prison, though to a great extent incomprehensible, seemed yet to convey some information which had to be taken into account.

The letter was written in French.

Doubtless the bandits who were Red Ralph's accomplices did not understand this language, which was probably the reason why the captive had chosen it, in order to hide from them the object of so important a message.

The question which first presented itself was this : Why had Jeanne written these lines at all ? It was an imprudent action, which could not be explained except on the supposition that she thought herself able to count upon the help of a messenger.

Perhaps pity had entered the heart even of some of these wretches ? Perhaps there were some who, like the negro Biji, were ready to avenge themselves by treachery upon the chief who had treated them badly ?

But what could scarcely be doubtful was, that Red

Ralph had surprised the girl in the act of writing, and that she had only had time to tear in two the letter and partly to destroy the fragments.

It was a pity that the greater portion of it was wanting.

Ned Bark and Freedy—the latter, thanks to the logical nature of his mind, the former, by reason of his detective habits—were both apt at deciphering the most abstruse problems of cryptography.

But here the difficulties were numerous.

First of all, the manner in which the paper was torn rendered it impossible for them to know the size of the sheet on which she had written, or, consequently, the length of the lines upon it and the number of words missing. A few points, nevertheless, were beyond dispute.

Thanks to the exactness of the expressions, it was easy to discover the sense of certain phrases.

"I have been able so far . . ." to defend myself? "He will take me . . ." "I overheard a few words interchanged . . ." between him and some one else? "He spoke of a . . ." town? "in Louisiana. . . ."

But the three last lines were untranslatable.

Had the words "to understand" been preceded by "I have been able," or "I have not been able"? They evidently applied to the name of the town chosen by Red Ralph as a fresh prison for his captive.

Then "to Wood . . ." What did that mean?

The thought that occurred most naturally to the mind was that she was mentioning Mr. Woodman the

planter, whom she knew to be one of her father's truest friends.

Then the word "help!" It was her final prayer.

In view of this problem, of which the solution seemed yet so far to seek, Valville and his friends experienced a feeling of great discouragement.

What should they do? Whither should they direct their steps?

In vain they repeated half a dozen times the perilous ascent of Devil's Rock, explored its recesses, and examined its steepest cliffs. They found traces of the supports on which the rope ladders had formerly been hung. But notwithstanding all their perseverance, they could not understand in what manner the bandits had escaped and carried away with them the unfortunate daughter of the planter of Battle Field.

They had not gone by sea; for the men on board Cartwright's schooner had seen no other vessel leave the shore, and their position allowed them to survey the coast for a very considerable distance. When they made their way over the enormous blocks of stone which constituted the granite promontory of Devil's Rock, they found nothing but masses of rocks which were lost by degrees in impenetrable cypress thickets.

Although nothing there indicated the recent passage of a body of men, it was still possible that the ruffians had disappeared by this route.

To all these causes for depression, another was now added. Alice regarded her merry young brother with a deep affection. Valville also was much attached to him.

Certainly they had often laughed at the harebrained lad who himself made a jest of everything ; but amidst the strange circumstances in which they had been placed, he had shown so much courage, so much joyous carelessness in the face of danger, that he had revealed himself in quite a new light.

And he had disappeared ! Had he lost his life in one of the torrents that rushed down the mountain-side ? Had he been surprised, entrapped, killed by the bandits ? The field of conjecture was vast, but, unfortunately, every hypothesis was equally unbearable.

Were they all to be vanquished in the combat in which they had engaged ? Would they fall one by one, without rescuing Jeanne from her persecutors, or avenging the unfortunate planter who had fallen a victim to a frightful crime ?

These were the thoughts that tortured Charles Valville's heart.

Had he a right to bind to his side those whom he loved, and lead them into these ever-recurring dangers, —Alice, above all, who had devoted her life to him so faithfully ? And if, perchance, some misfortune happened to her, how should he dare to present himself before the excellent, generous Madame Longpré, to whom she was more than life—the last hope of her old age ?

No, it was Valville's duty no longer to accept these sacrifices. It was too much already that Eusèbe should have paid his devotion with his life ; other victims must not fall. To him alone belonged the duty of continuing his task.

And, resolved upon carrying out his determination, Valville drew Alice aside.

They sat down upon the rocks. Before them a waterfall, white with foam, fell over the stones into a sort of gulf below.

"Alice, my own love," said Valville, "listen to me: we ought to separate . . ."

But his words were cut short. With a cry of despair, Alice guessed and comprehended all.

"Not a word more!" she exclaimed. "I am your companion, your friend, your wife. Whither you go, I will go. Whatever your arguments may be, however powerful you may think them, they will never change my resolution."

And as the young man entreated her to listen, she added—

"Your task is mine also. If it is true that my poor brother has fallen, we must discover his murderers; and if there is time we may save him yet."

Valville yielded. And the two young people, obeying their feelings of generous enthusiasm, vowed, in face of a scene which nature had rendered at once terrible and magnificent, to live and die together: a new betrothal which bound them yet more closely one to the other.

Hesitancy had lasted long enough. It was time to look the situation in the face and take a decisive resolution.

A council was held. The brave Cartwright, who had forgotten his passion for crabs in real emotion, was asked for his opinion.

Ned Bark was, however, the first to speak.

The worthy detective had had his share of humiliation, although he had neglected nothing; and, according to the terms of his contract, had bravely risked his life.

But there was no use in dissimulating the fact that all his efforts had ended in failure, which was serious, if not irreparable.

In his opinion it would be best to follow out the vague intimations given in the letter, which he thus explained.

"So far," he said, "the ruffian, Red Ralph, has not dared to abuse his strength by forcibly imposing his wishes upon your sister. He sees that neither menaces nor fears have any effect upon that courageous heart; and perhaps he wants now, by taking her again to Louisiana, to attempt other methods of intimidation: possibly to threaten the life of her sister Lucile."

The danger was thus shifted, but not diminished. Still if it were true, according to Ned, that Red Ralph had chosen this new field of action, it would be easier to call him to account there than here.

In any case there was not a minute to lose. They must regain the Woodman Plantation, and place Lucile in safety at New Orleans.

Afterwards they could act according to circumstances.

"But," added Ned Bark, "I have a scheme in my head which I will tell you later, a scheme which may help us to win the day."

In fact, although their new hopes were so precarious, it was evident that the safer plan was to leave the unex-

plored regions where Red Ralph possessed unknown resources. And a study of Jeanne's letter led them all to believe that the detective's suppositions were not inadmissible.

It was therefore decided that they should return immediately to St. Augustine and Jacksonville, and make their way thence by train, as quickly as possible, to New Orleans.

As it was certain that Red Ralph and his accomplices would not risk a journey by frequented ways—a fact which would necessarily retard their progress—it would be prudent to precede him in Louisiana, and prepare their batteries before his arrival.

Cartwright's schooner was quite ready to resume its course. And on the evening of the very day when our friends landed, full of hope, on that accursed coast, the 'Tortoise' sped rapidly northwards. They waited a few hours only at St. Augustine in order to take up Madame Longpré, and also in the hope of gaining in the town some information as to the movements of the bandits. But Ned Bark could hear nothing of them.

At last they reached Jacksonville.

Here Cartwright took leave of his new companions.

He was about to quit North America and pursue his scientific researches on the coasts of Brazil.

He was most assuredly a very eccentric individual. But he had shown once more, that any man who loves science with his whole heart must needs possess some of the finer qualities which do honour to the human race.

His allies for the last few days took leave of him with

many a hearty clasp of the hand. Would they ever meet again?

Tears were in Cartwright's eyes as he parted from them, and when the Florida Atlantic Railway was carrying Valville off to Tallahassee, the naturalist was seen in the small boat belonging to his schooner, at the mouth of the St. John's River, waving them a last adieu.

It was not without deep sadness that Valville again performed the journey which he had taken with Freedy upon their first arrival from Europe. Long days had rolled away since then, and nothing had yet been done.

The distance of six hundred miles between Jacksonville and Mobile was traversed with the rapidity of lightning. The American trains, at full steam, leave our prudent European railways far behind. But are not Americans travellers exposed to greater danger of accidents? Perhaps not, if we take into account the distances they travel and the number of travellers. And Americans commonly think very little about danger so long as they go fast enough. We have heard of the achievements of their steamers, which run races on the Mississippi. The same thing happens sometimes on railway lines. They have actually devised races by railroad.

They are conducted in this manner. Upon two parallel lines, two trains start at the same time at full speed. Which of the two will outdistance the other? The stokers and engine-drivers use the wildest means of accelerating the pace of their trains. They madden

themselves with excitement, and gladly risk their very lives in the struggle.

But the most curious, and not the least interesting, part of the matter is, that, after the interchange of bets to a considerable amount on the swiftness of their respective engines, the men who bet and the judges of the result should all be seated in the trains.

When the speed is equal, menaces and insults are hurled from one train to the other. The passengers shout to the stokers to quicken the pace, and promise them immense rewards in case of victory.

And if the engine-drivers obey these demands so far as to put on steam until the boilers burst, why, then, they all blow up together—engine-drivers, betting-men, judges, and all! Thus no jealousy is left behind.

Indeed the Americans treat their locomotives rather like toys. They exert their ingenuity to make the engines look like diabolical faces, thanks to the two lanterns fastened on each side, and an open grating which allows the glowing furnace to be seen. At night the aspect presented is actually startling, all the more so as the chimney is very large and emits an enormous jet of smoke and flame, which, just above the fiendish-looking face, much resembles a fiery plume on the head of a demon.

Our travellers arrived at Mobile, however, without any accident.

We may remind ourselves that the first time this journey was made, Valville and Freedy performed it

with Alice and Madame Longpré, on horseback, by way of precaution.

But now it was useless to seek to deceive the enemies, against whom war had been openly declared.

A steamer was already getting up steam in the Mobile harbour, on the point of starting for New Orleans. Freedy had just time to go to the hotel and see whether any letters had arrived there for him, but upon receiving an answer in the negative, he rejoined his friends, and they went immediately on board.

Nothing occurred to disturb their journey, and they landed at last on the wharf at New Orleans.

It had been decided that Valville should proceed to Pontchartrain, with Freedy and Sambo; and that Alice and her aunt should seek hospitality at the house of some friends of the Valville family, who lived in the French quarter of the town. As for Ned Bark, he was bound on further expeditions, as he still held himself to be in the service of those whose cause he had espoused.

The three men set off in the direction of the Woodman Plantation on horseback.

Alice and Madame Longpré were received with open arms by a family of French origin, living in the Rue Bourbon, and consisting of the father, M. Blanchemont, his wife, and their four daughters.

The two visitors felt as if they were once more on French soil. Did we wish to flatter the national vanity of a Frenchman, we might say that only in a French

family can one find that real hospitality without constraint which sets a guest as much at ease with his hosts as if he were in his own house.

M. Blanchemont, whose ancestors had helped to found the town of New Orleans, belonged to those Protestants whom an iniquitous and impious measure banished from France, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

Although the family had prospered far beyond its dreams, it had never forgotten its mother country, whom it did not hold responsible for the sufferings it had undergone. Bound by interest to America, it was attached by the far stronger ties of affection to France. And it had taken pride—perhaps not an unworthy pride—in the fact that in the veins of each member of the family the blood of old Gaul yet flowed in all its purity.

The Blanchemonts had never married into any race but their own. And it was easy to see, by a glance at Madame Blanchemont and her daughters, that the type of race remained unchanged.

It was the same with their speech. The father of the family had constituted himself his children's tutor, in order that they might not be led away by the charm of that Creole dialect, which is really the admixture of two tongues. The French language had been preserved in this family with really extraordinary accuracy; and even in listening to the most casual conversation in that house, a purist would have rejoiced to hear, with scarcely any alteration, the correct idiom and accent of the eighteenth century. So with the manners and habits

of all the members of the family. Although M. Blanchemont had no claim to high rank, and was as proud of his position as a commoner as others are of the possession of pompous titles, yet the exquisite refinement visible at every moment in his address recalled to mind the best days of old-world French courtesy.

He had known Mr. Valville very well, and sincerely deplored his sad end. Accordingly he was delighted to receive the young lady, whom his old friend's son confided to his care as his future wife and most valued treasure.

" You come direct from France," he said to Madame Longpré. " I shall be delighted if, in our midst, you feel as though you were no longer in a strange land. It seems to us as if you formed a part of the old home which you bring back to us unchanged, whilst ours is never long at rest! . . . "—and a sigh concluded the sentence.

Notwithstanding their energy the two fair travellers were almost sinking with fatigue. The woman with the iron will herself was bowed down with sorrow. The disappearance of Eusèbe had inflicted a sad wound upon her heart. She had long considered the two young people as her children, and could hardly separate them one from the other in her maternal affection; but it must be confessed that in one corner of her heart she cherished a tiny preference for the fastidious lad whom she knew to be really so good and kind.

Rooms were quickly prepared for them.

Although Madame Blanchemont and her daughters

refrained with true tact from asking any questions, they could easily see that some great grief was weighing down the spirits of their new friends. When Madame Longpré was about to retire, she drew towards her Madame Blanchemont's two younger daughters—lovely girls of twelve and fourteen years old—and pressed them to her breast.

"Happy mother!" she said with tears in her eyes.
"May you be made happier still by these dear children,
whom I bless from the bottom of my heart."

The two elder girls, Pauline and Marthe, already seemed to look upon Alice as a sister.

In spite of herself, Alice felt a sort of peace descend upon her heart and calm her troubled spirit at the very sight of this happy and united family. Here was the happiness for which she herself had prayed; and she asked herself whether she was indeed called upon to renounce such hopes for ever.

It seemed as if Madame Blanchemont—a fair woman of some forty years, with a sweet, good face—had guessed her secret thoughts, for when she bade her good-night she said, smiling—

"I wish you pleasant dreams. And remember there is no trial too great to bear, if only one's conscience is pure."

Alice felt comforted by the gentle words, and the peaceful shadow of a quiet home enveloped her once again.

No sooner had she reached her room, and sent her best thoughts and wishes after those she loved, than she

fell asleep, and slept with all the soundness of her twenty years.

Meanwhile Valville, Freedy, and the negro were galloping with loose rein towards the Woodman Plantation.

To them calm did not come. On the contrary, new anxieties assailed them. When once a man has felt himself borne down by what seems the force of fate, he must possess rare strength of mind if he can avoid belief in dark presentiments.

Had Lucile also been threatened?

When they saw from afar the magnolia groves which formed an almost impenetrable hedge round the plantation, the hearts of the two friends beat so violently that they suddenly drew rein, as though by mutual consent.

They looked at each other, and Valville clasped Freedy's hand.

"Come!" said Freedy, "courage! The future belongs to the brave!"

And they spurred forward to the magnolia grove.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RED RALPH'S FOREFATHERS.

FORTUNATELY the fears of our friends were not justified by fact. If the efforts of their enemies were to tend in this direction, their time had not yet come, for the plantation had not, so far, been the object of any hostile attack.

Thus they were informed by Mr. Woodman, whose anxiety of mind had been very great, and who listened with deep interest to the narrative rapidly given by the travellers.

"I quite approve," he said, "of your prudence in leaving Miss Lodier and her aunt at New Orleans, at my friend Blanchemont's house."

"You are then of opinion," said Valville, "that I ought to take my sister there too?"

"Certainly, without any loss of time."

At this point Lucile, who had been informed of the arrival of the two young men, appeared upon the scene, and threw her arms round her brother's neck.

"It is you at last!" she cried. Then, looking round her with an expression of terror, she added, "But where is Jeanne, my sister?"

The two men hung their heads. Freedy especially grew

very pale; for, although he had done his duty and risked his life without considering danger, he could not forget that he had vowed never to return to Lucile, the woman whom he loved, until he could restore her sister to her side.

And had not Lucile guessed that silent vow which Freedy had registered in his secret thoughts? Could not Freedy read her faith in him in the sad glance which she gave him, the glance in which he read so bitter a reproach?

Woodman understood the situation and hastened to interpose.

"Lucile," he said quickly, "a defeat does not mean that we must needs despair of ultimate victory."

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Freedy. "If you only knew, Mademoiselle, how earnestly, how fervently we have striven!"

Lucile's face grew inexpressibly sweet. She felt that she had been unjust, and wished to repair the wrong that she had done them. She held out her hand to her brother.

"Forgive me," she said; "but you know that I grieve and that I suffer; I love my dear Jeanne so much."

"At least," said Valville, with an angry gesture, "one of my father's ruffianly murderers has expiated his crime already."

"Our father must be avenged," answered Lucile quickly; "but would he not himself, if he were here, tell you to think first of his beloved daughter?"

"Dearest Lucile," said the young man, "pray do not think that I have renounced the work which should be first

of all with us ; we are just starting again, but this time either we shall die or Jeanne shall be restored to you."

"Die? Oh, how terrible! What would become of me if you were all to leave me?"

"In my turn, Lucile, I must tell you not to despair. But, you see, we must first be relieved from the anxiety which, in spite of ourselves, limits our liberty of action."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we have returned so quickly only because we have serious reason to believe that unknown dangers await you too."

"Await me?"

"And we wish to have nothing to fear on your account, at least; so we are going to take you immediately with us to New Orleans."

Mr. Woodman explained in as few words as possible the reason for this sudden decision. The girl had no objection to make. She even added, with a shake of the head—

"You are right, perhaps; I may not be safe here."

"What do you mean?" asked Freedy. "Have you noticed any sign of danger?"

"Nothing positive," said the girl; "and yet . . ."

"Pray continue."

"It is perhaps only a fancy of my overwrought brain, but sometimes it seems to me as if an invisible watch were kept over me. If now and then, wishing to escape from the cares which pursue me, I wander as far as the end of the park, I seem to hear steps behind me among the bushes, steps which follow me . . ."

"You never mentioned this before," interrupted Woodman.

"Because I did not wish to make you anxious, and because it may be folly on my part; and yet it seems to me as if enemies were watching and spying out my movements."

"All the more reason for not delaying your departure an hour longer," said Freedy.

"I am ready to go with you."

As Lucile was not yet strong enough to ride, Mr. Woodman ordered a carriage to be in readiness, and while she went to her room in order to prepare for the journey, the two friends remained with the planter, and Valville completed the story of his past adventures.

There was one detail which he had not yet made known. The reader will remember that when Valville had been surprised into a visit to the island in the Matanzas, he had met Red Ralph face to face, and the robber, in a fit of rage, had told him his real name.

"Ralph Staunton!" exclaimed Mr. Woodman when Valville mentioned this fact. "What! does that ruffian belong to so respectable a family?"

"He told me so himself."

The planter became thoughtful.

"I knew his father very well," he said. "He was, and I believe is still, a brave man, but imbued with a fierce prejudice against the negro race. And I remember to have heard that one of his family—his eldest son, in fact—was banished from his house on account of some dishonourable action. It was great severity on the

father's part, and see what has been the result : he has made a robber of the son whom perhaps he might have saved."

Then, striking his forehead with one hand, Mr. Woodman added—

"Who can tell ? He may yet have some influence with his son. Suppose I were to appeal to our old acquaintanceship ; no doubt he does not know what has become of Ralph . . ."

"Your idea may be a good one," Valville interrupted him quickly. "I tell you that I do not think humanity is quite extinct in that wretched man's heart. For proof, look at the ascendancy which my sister has established over him ! She is in his power, but she has made him treat her with respect."

"Well, as soon as you have started for New Orleans I will make my way to Mr. Staunton. I think he lives at Galveston ; I shall be there in two days, and you may be sure I will plead your cause with him. If the father has still any power over his son, we may perhaps gain more than we imagine."

"Heaven grant we may!"

"It is a strange thing that in that very family there have already been several examples of the singular case that we have before us to-day. It never occurred to me before to recall the memories which cling to the house of Staunton ; but now that I know Red Ralph's true name, these old stories thrust themselves forward in my mind, and I cannot refrain from asking myself whether we dare doubt the existence of terrible fatalities, such

as immortalised the house of Atreus in the days of antiquity."

"Explain yourself," said Freedy. "Such stories have reached my own ears, but I never attached any credit to them."

"Nevertheless they are true, and while Lucile is getting ready I can tell you the most terrible story of all."

"We shall be glad to hear it," said Valville.

"Oh, my story will not be a long one. During the War of Independence the Stauntons lived in Savannah, in Georgia, and boldly espoused the cause of the country against the English. Edward Staunton, the head of the family and father of five sons, had raised a body of soldiers; and it was marvellous to see the energy and courage of these patriotic men, as they struggled, with neither truce nor intermission, against the enemies of American liberty.

"But a dark day rose at last, which left a terrible memory in the history of the Staunton family.

"One morning, out of the five sons of Staunton, one was missing at the roll-call. Where was he? Had he been surprised and taken prisoner by the enemy? In vain they exhausted their ingenuity in conjecture. But, strange to say, the more closely they pursued their inquiries, the less possible it seemed that the absentee should have fallen into a snare.

"The sentinels, the outposts, had not been attacked. No one had noticed any of the enemy's troops in the vicinity.

"The son who had so mysteriously disappeared was named Ralph Staunton, as is also the one who lives now. He was the youngest of the five sons, and his father's favourite.

"The little camp of the patriots was situated at the foot of a hill, on the bank of a stream swollen by the winter rains, over which they had been obliged to throw a temporary bridge made of trunks of trees tied together.

"One of Staunton's companions affirmed that at day-break he had seen a man cross the bridge and leave the camp. But that it was Ralph Staunton he could not positively declare.

"The father's head was bowed as though he felt that disgrace was near. If his beloved son had been surprised and put to death his heart would have bled; but then, fixing his eyes upon the banner which floated above the camp, he could have told himself that his son had suffered and died for the independence of his country. But Ralph seemed to have gone of his own free will! He had abandoned his father, his brothers, his companions in arms, on the eve of combat! This was desertion and cowardice!

"Edward Staunton was destined to receive, all too soon, a confirmation of his worst suspicions.

"On the following night the camp was attacked by a superior force. The little troop of Americans performed prodigies of valour. Hand to hand they fought their enemies, and two of Staunton's sons were killed. Of the fifty brave men who defended the post, only

twenty at most escaped and sought refuge in the mountains.

"But the worst blow of all fell when, in the midst of the combat, a jesting voice—the voice of the chief on the enemy's side—cried to the father—

"'It was your son who showed us the way to the camp.'

"His son! was it possible? Yes, true indeed it was. Staunton lost no time in filling up the blanks which death had left in his little band. Nobody took pay at that time. Everybody was ready to be a soldier and to fight for the liberation of his country.

"A few days afterwards Staunton gained a first advantage. He surprised some English troops and made several prisoners.

"He longed above everything to hear his son spoken of—to disabuse his mind of the terrible doubt that tortured it.

"Well, he heard that Ralph Staunton had fallen in love with an Englishwoman, and had left the camp in order to join her; and that this woman had known how to transform the madman into a traitor, and obtain accurate information from him as to the plans of the Americans.

"When this frightful revelation was made to old Staunton he turned as pale as death. But not a single word escaped his lips, and nobody could guess what resolution he was about to form.

"Meanwhile the war was carried on more vigorously than ever. The English began to feel that the soil of a

free America was no longer theirs. By his splendid manœuvres Washington fatigued and exhausted the enemy.

"Staunton had offered his services to the General, and often accompanied the advanced guard of the Federal army.

"He seemed to have forgotten the past, and the name of his youngest son was never heard.

"One day Staunton, after a forced march of unusual rapidity, surprised several English officers in a lonely house. Amongst them was Lord Clifton, one of the leaders of the English army. It was a most important capture. Staunton returned to Washington's camp with his prisoners, and the General congratulated him warmly.

"'Name your own reward,' he said.

"'Allow me to dispose of my prisoner.'

"Washington looked at him in surprise.

"'Staunton,' he said, 'remember that prisoners of war are protected by their rights as men. Republicans, above all others, ought to show an example of humanity.'

"'Reassure yourself, General; Lord Clifton's life shall be respected. More than that, in a few days I hope I shall set him at liberty, imposing on him only a promise not to serve against us any more.'

"'Then do as you like.'

"Lord Clifton was placed in a tent next to Staunton's, and was treated with the greatest respect. What was old Staunton's project? Nobody knew, not even his two

remaining sons. All that was known was that he had despatched a messenger to some unknown destination.

"Several days passed away without result before the messenger returned.

"Staunton questioned him. He had succeeded in his mission. And what do you think that mission was?

"The Englishwoman for whose sake Ralph Staunton had become a coward and a traitor was Lord Clifton's daughter. The messenger had been to seek her and to say—

"Your father has fallen into Edward Staunton's power. Restore to him his son, and your father shall be free."

"And she, expert in treason, and impelled, not by filial love, but by family pride, had consented to deliver up Ralph Staunton in order to purchase the liberty of the English peer.

"An interview was arranged between Staunton and the officers of the English army.

"The father came to it, accompanied by a small escort.

"The two parties met on the borders of a forest of giant trees, whose trunks when felled are found to be of such dimensions that men on horseback can ride through one of them as through a gateway.

"Staunton restated the terms of the agreement. He would exchange Lord Clifton for his son Ralph. The conditions were accepted, and Staunton returned to the camp in company with his son.

"The young man had not addressed a single word to his father. Although no threats had been uttered, he understood well enough that retribution was very nigh.

"Staunton presented himself to Washington and demanded a court-martial, which was immediately held. Ralph was placed before his judges, and Edward Staunton denounced and accused him.

"The old man displayed no anger. He spoke as coldly as if the accused had not been of his own blood. He demanded that Ralph should be condemned to death.

"The crime was patent. The prisoner confessed his guilt. The judges could not hesitate in sentencing the accused. And yet they pitied the father whose inflexibility ill concealed his suffering.

"They never doubted but that Staunton would ask and obtain his son's pardon. Ralph was condemned to death.

"The father bowed and left the court.

"Two hours afterwards Ralph Staunton was paraded before the whole army and publicly degraded from his rank.

"This alone was a terrible punishment. Would this not satisfy the offended father's wrath? But Washington waited for Staunton in vain. What! dared not the father claim pardon for his son? The General sent his aide-de-camp to him.

"'Do you wish for Ralph's pardon?' he asked.

"'I asked for justice,' responded Staunton. 'Let justice be done.'

"And Ralph Staunton was shot.

"When his son had fallen before the balls, Staunton listed up his body and buried it with his own hands. Then, and then only, he wept. But he had accomplished his task, even to the bitter end !

"Such are the terrible memories which the name of Staunton recalls," Mr. Woodman added. "And let me tell you that I know the old Staunton, who is living now, and I believe that, like his forefather, he would be an inflexible judge."

As the planter concluded his story, Lucile reappeared in travelling costume.

The carriage was ready. Woodman kissed the young girl tenderly.

"Courage!" he said to her. "And do not despair of seeing your sister again."

Sambo drove, and the horses set off rapidly in the direction of New Orleans.

The road from Lake Chamberlain to New Orleans lies between cypress swamps, and the winter rains had ploughed great furrows of mud across it. All the negro's skill and the horses' strength were necessary to surmount the difficulties of the way.

Valville went inside the carriage with his sister, while Freedy occupied the seat beside Sambo.

Suddenly the negro started.

"Look, master," he said to Freedy, "the storm is coming!"

It was true. Enormous masses of black cloud covered the sky; for the tempests of Louisiana, veritable

hurricanes, which sometimes lay waste a large extent of territory, burst forth with a suddenness which defies all preparation.

Scarcely had Sambo uttered these words of warning when torrents of rain began to fall, the forerunners of the tempest.

The terrified horses reared and refused to advance any farther.

They were already too far on their way to think of returning to the Woodman Plantation. Yet they must at all hazards obtain shelter.

"Hold the reins," said Sambo, springing to the ground. "I will try and find some sort of cabin in which we can at least place Miss Lucile in safety."

The danger increased every moment. The maddened horses could hardly be reined in.

But at last Sambo returned.

"Come quickly!" he said. "I have found a place of refuge."

The rain had already drenched the garments of the shivering girl. Valville took his sister in his arms and followed the negro, while Freedy, seizing the horses' reins, dragged them in the same direction.

Thus they arrived at some wooden huts which formerly had been erected by woodcutters.

They stood upon the edge of a pond. A negro, seemingly indifferent to the tempest, sat upon the very brink.

Lucile and Valville entered one of the huts, the dis-

jointed rafters of which would serve at least as a temporary shelter.

Freedy unharnessed the horses and led them into a shed.

"It seems to me," said Lucile, "that this storm is of evil omen for us all!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A CAPTURE.

THUS an hour passed by. The wind drove against their frail shelter with such violence that several times the travellers had reason to fear that it would fall about their heads.

Fortunately these tempests, so frequent in Louisiana, are not of long duration. The fury of the storm soon subsided, and Freedy was able to go out and explore the neighbourhood.

On one side, the house in which they had taken refuge fronted a small waterfall, now considerably swollen by the rain. Several trees had been uprooted, and the road was almost impracticable, especially for Mr. Woodman's carriage, which was solidly built and rather heavy.

The travellers consulted together. It was evident that even if the carriage were driven into the midst of the ruts and hollows made by the storm, its course would soon be arrested by insuperable obstacles.

On the other hand, waiting was an impossibility. These wooden huts were inhabited already.

"We must come to some resolution," said Charles. "We cannot stay here and risk the approach of night."

A few hours of daylight remain to us : let us take advantage of them at once. How far, Freedy, do you think Frenier, the nearest railway station, is from here?"

For, by reason of the situation of Mr. Woodman's plantation, the travellers had intended to follow the coast-line of Lake Pontchartrain, by which route, if they had met with no accident, they might have reached New Orleans almost as quickly as by rail.

But as matters now stood Charles's idea was practicable.

"The station must be about eight miles off."

"What kind of roads?"

"Hum! very little frequented, and they must have suffered under this torrent of rain."

"Never mind, the horses are strong and active. If Lucile will consent, I will ride one, and she can ride behind me ; you, Freedy, can take the other. Sambo will stay here and manage to send the carriage back to the plantation. What do you think of the plan?"

"It is possible," said Freedy. "I think it is perhaps the only way practicable. What do you think of it, Mademoiselle Lucile?"

"As for me," said the girl, "I am ready to go with you wherever you go."

And these words were accompanied with a slight but significant glance, which proved that Lucile was becoming very submissive to Doctor Freedy's wishes.

"Then let us set off," said Valville.

Sambo approved of the decision at which they had arrived, although he regretted the separation from his

master. But he felt sure that he could obtain means for sending home the carriage, and then he would immediately follow the others to New Orleans.

They made haste to unharness the horses. Freedy and Valville were first-rate horsemen, and troubled themselves little about the absence of bit and saddle.

They arranged a more comfortable sort of seat for Lucile by means of cloaks. She was not nervous, and feared nothing so long as her brother was before her.

They cut long switches from the trees for riding-whips, and then started at a good pace for Frenier. They were often obliged to slacken their pace, but their horses were surefooted, and the distance could be accomplished in less than two hours.

At last the travellers caught sight of the suspension bridge which crosses an arm of Lake Pontchartrain ; the station was in sight, and a distant column of steam announced the approach of a train.

They quitted the side of the lake and reached the station. This time chance served them well, for the train was expected in a few minutes. They had only to find some one to take charge of their horses, a task speedily accomplished.

And at last Lucile and her two companions had the pleasure of finding themselves whirled away in the train to New Orleans.

Our readers, doubtless, accustomed to European modes of travel, might find it difficult to realise the comfort presented by American railway trains, especially in the Southern States, where they have been more recently

introduced, and are therefore even better constructed than in the North.

The American cars, large, lofty, well ventilated, are capable of holding some fifty passengers. The seats are arranged in two rows, with a passage down the middle. One may sit face forward or face backward, for the seat revolves upon a pivot.

What a difference there is between these comfortable cars, and some of our Procrustean stalls, in which the traveller is packed like an unfortunate herring !

Each compartment contains a lavatory with a wash-hand stand, water-bottle, and glass ; also a stove which can be lighted in winter. A cord which runs the whole length of the train puts every traveller into communication with the guard at will.

And let us remember that with us, on some lines, a traveller in any danger may break the pane of glass which divides him from the signal-ring, pull the ring violently, and obtain no result at all, because the said ring communicates with nothing and nobody.

One may walk through all the compartments of an American train while it is still in motion, and even stand outside them, leaning against a railing for the better contemplation of the landscape.

A man sells newspapers, books, and eatables as he walks up and down the cars. From time to time the guard examines the tickets, without inconveniencing the travellers, however, as they generally fasten them into the band of their hats.

In certain compartments smoking is now allowed,

but, every picture has its darker side, and Americans chew everywhere. Chewing is a peculiarly American weakness.

Still, addressing ourselves to smokers, we may ask whether even those who are most accustomed to the fumes of tobacco are not sometimes nearly suffocated in our narrow smoking compartments? Twelve cigars, or twelve pipes, in a space of a few cubic feet!

There are reserved carriages for ladies, whom Americans profess to treat with great respect, but their husbands or escorts have the right of entering these reserved compartments with them. They are simply carriages where smoking is strictly forbidden. No gentleman, however, can enter them without the consent of the lady who is with him. We must say that in America a bachelor is at a decided disadvantage, and it has even been said that a foreign nobleman, who was unmarried, used always to take his female cook about with him, so that under the protection of this lady, at least, he might pass in and out, and, not being a smoker himself, fly from the fumes of American lovers of the weed.

The seats can also be transformed into beds at night by a very ingenious process; and one can sleep in them quite as well as in the berth of a steamer, especially as there is no sea-sickness to be feared. The beds are one above the other; and the only danger is that of receiving on one's head the fellow-traveller who sleeps in the upper story, and who has proved too great a weight for the support afforded.

The palace-cars, or state-rooms, which may be occu-

pied by one passenger, are still more comfortable, and can be made quite home-like.

Every facility is certainly given for travelling in the United States, and we cannot but regret that in Europe a traveller is regarded with little more consideration than if he were a bale of goods !

But during our digression the train has left Frenier, stopped at Kenner, and finally entered New Orleans.

Our three travellers took a carriage and at once repaired to M. Blanchemont's house.

This time at least anxiety was uncalled for ; it seemed as if fortune was weary for a moment of persecuting our friends.

They were once more united, and could talk together over the terrible events that had happened ; above all, unfortunately, of the dark fears awakened by the absence of Eusèbe and the fresh disappearance of Jeanne.

About ten o'clock in the evening a servant approached Freedy and whispered a few words into his ear. Freedy made a gesture of surprise, and quickly dismissed the man.

This incident passed unnoticed. Pauline and Marthe, the two elder daughters of M. Blanchemont, were endeavouring to dispel the sad memories which clouded the faces of Madame Longpré and her niece.

Freedy drew close to Charles and bent over him.

"We must go out," he said.

Valville looked up at him in amaze, but upon a sign from Freedy he understood that any remark would be imprudent. He felt instinctively that they might be on

the point of solving a problem which hitherto had sadly taxed their ingenuity.

He found a pretext, therefore, for taking leave of Alice and his sister at once. In another moment the two men found themselves in Canal Street, the great thoroughfare which divides into two nearly equal portions the city of New Orleans, with the French part of the town on the right hand, and the American on the left.

There Valville asked—

“What is the matter?”

“Ned Bark has sent for me.”

“Does he know anything?”

“I don’t know. But he is not the man to act without a motive.”

“Where are you to meet him?”

“At the foot of Henry Clay’s statue.”

“Come, then.”

In a few minutes the two friends arrived at the appointed spot.

A man stood leaning against the pedestal of the statue, but Freedy and Valville really hesitated to believe that this was the man whom they had come to meet. Ned was small and wiry-looking, this man was tall and stout. And yet it was the same man, only the detective knew how to alter his stature and appearance in a manner which might have deceived the most experienced eye.

As soon as they had gained his side, Ned Bark made them a sign and began to walk towards the American

quarter, first through the commercial streets, where the shops were now closed, then into a maze of narrow alleys, lighted here and there by a yellow jet of gas, while Freedy and Valville followed the detective without receiving a single word of recognition.

They arrived at last at some cross roads, something like the Seven Dials in London, the Five Points of New York, or the old Place Maubert of Paris. This place was called Muddy Cross, a curious name, which fitly characterised the muddy space from which branched out several dark and narrow roads of peculiarly uninviting appearance.

Here Ned Bark stopped, and the two friends rejoined him.

"Are we at the place?" asked Freedy.

"Nearly."

"What have we to do in this vile neighbourhood?"

"Follow up our search; and this time I am certain of obtaining some important result. You see," added Ned Bark, "I do not insult you by asking if you are ready to confront danger, however serious it may be."

"Of course! You know that you may count upon us."

"Are you armed?"

Each of the two men carried a revolver.

"That is well," replied the detective. "But you must remove the cartridges. In what we have to do it is important that we should not attract the notice of the thieves who frequent this neighbourhood. A shot would compromise the success of our expedition, by

exposing us to attacks which we could not possibly resist."

"Our revolvers are uncocked," said Freedy. "I think that will be sufficient, and you need not fear any imprudence from us."

"Very well. But unless our lives are really in danger, don't fire."

"Agreed. Now what have we to do?"

"You must go with me into one of those wretched holes called gaming-houses, the haunts of theft and drunkenness. The most important point is that nobody must guess who we are. You, Mr. Valville and Doctor Freedy, are not known, and you need only disarrange your clothes a little to appear like any other gambler or 'scalawag,' like those with whom you are about to mix. You can easily tell from this what sort of manner you had better adopt."

"Good," said Valville; "we will do our best."

"As for me, I intend to use some old methods which always succeed, and I am sure of passing unrecognised. As soon as we go in I shall take my place at one of the tables, and you must draw near and feign to be deeply interested in the game. Upon a sign from me you must take part in it. Only, don't forget one small detail. When you risk a few notes place your revolver beside you with some ostentation; that is always done in this land of mutual confidence."

"And then?"

"Do not trouble yourself about anything else. I shall

be there, and will let you know what we must do, according to circumstances."

"Let us go then," said the two friends.

"One last word," said Ned Bark. "As you know, I distrust the metropolitan police too deeply to drag them into this affair. That is why I have had recourse to you. And if any of these wretches guess what is my profession, you may be sure that neither you nor I will leave their haunt alive."

They entered one of the streets which diverged from Muddy Cross. It was composed of old buildings, which seemed as if they could hardly stand upright, and were staggering like a drunkard on his legs. On the ground-floor, through windows the dirt of which seemed redoubled by the reddish reflection of the filthy curtains, one could see, by the gaslight, the shadows of gesticulating figures, and the sound of hoarse, rough voices could be heard.

Sometimes one of the doors would open, and into the street men rolled out, quarrelling, swearing, and falling, as they staggered away into the night; sometimes the group engaged in a fierce fight, enlivened with oaths and savage grindings of teeth.

Before such a house Ned stopped at last. It was dark, but seemed to be inhabited. A wooden door, secured with iron bars, guarded the entrance.

The detective raised a knocker, and knocked several times in a peculiar manner. There was a long silence. Then a voice from the interior uttered a few slang words, to which Ned replied. A sound as of the un-

fastening of chains was heard, and the door was half opened. Ned and his companions found themselves in an ill-smelling passage, dimly lighted by a wick floating in a vessel of oil.

The man who had opened the door exchanged a few more words with Ned Bark. Thieves are not chary of precautions, and it is always more difficult to enter their abodes than those of honest men.

It seemed, however, as if the explanations given by the detective were satisfactory ; the man went forward, and, having opened a second door, retired behind it in order to afford our three friends entrance.

Imagination could hardly picture a more alarmingly disreputable hole than that into which the three men were introduced. At first the smoke of pipes and cigars was so thick that nothing could be distinguished. For a moment Valville felt as if he should choke.

At one end of the room was a large leaden counter, loaded with bottles and mugs of every size, against which leaned a number of men, all talking at once. Whisky, gin, and brandy flowed copiously. There was a continual coming and going between hand and lips at the table. Behind the counter a red-haired man, of immense size and colossal stature, phlegmatically performed the functions of barman, serving in turn all those who wished to drink.

The rest of the room was filled with long tables and benches, the latter so crowded that they were completely hidden by the throng of human beings.

One could hear the sound of dice rolling and rebound-

ing, then the exclamations of the gamesters, imprecations from the losers, joyful shouts from the winners. As Ned Bark had said, each place was marked by a revolver. It could be easily seen that in cases of dispute powder and shot would soon be called into requisition.

Ned Bark had some difficulty in forcing his way through the crowded room. Valville and Freedy did not quit him, but paid heedful attention to his slightest movements, and made ready to obey the least sign from him.

The detective advanced slowly, seeking to pierce the fog with his one eye. A slight tremor agitated the muscles of his face at last. He marched deliberately to one of the tables, elbowed aside two players, and sat down, throwing a handful of greenbacks upon the table. The game was one played with dice, called 'crabs,' now little known. It is somewhat complicated, and, on account of its complication, requires great watchfulness on the part of the croupier.

The croupier who dealt at the table which Ned had chosen, was a tall man, frightfully thin, with a face terribly scarred, either by smallpox or from the effects of a fire.

At the detective's movement he had fixed his eyes upon him, and regarded him for some moments, evidently trying to discover who this new arrival could be.

His examination did not seem to afford him any reason for disquietude, however, for he threw the dice again and repeated the cry peculiar to the game of 'crabs.'

"Chance!"

Freedy and Valville had felt a moment's anxiety. Although Ned Bark was so well disguised, the robbers might recognise him! But they were soon reassured. The game began.

Three throws were made. Ned lost.

Then he leaned forward to the croupier and said a few words to him in a low tone, at the same time glancing at Freedy and Valville. The croupier seemed surprised, but smiled and said something in his turn to his companions, who immediately made room for the newcomers, while Ned invited them with a look to install themselves at the table.

The two friends obeyed without understanding why. Their confidence in Ned Bark was absolute.

They seated themselves.

"You have money?" said the croupier.

"A little," answered Freedy.

"Well, then, we'll make a night of it."

"And to put some life into it," added Ned, winking to the croupier, "I'll stand the drink all round."

"Bravo! Old Tom, best quality, then!"

The big tavern-keeper brought out an immense bottle, and the glasses were filled. Ned poured out bumper after bumper, drinking the croupier's health each time, and the croupier halted in the game only to drink also. Ned kept pace with him so courageously that Freedy and Valville were able to dispense with the potent spirit.

The game became very animated.

Freedy and Valville had not forgotten to place beside

them their revolvers, which served as paper-weights to their rolls of bank-notes.

With burning eyes the croupier threw the dice.

It is unnecessary to say that Valville and Freedy lost largely. More than a hundred dollars speedily went to swell the treasure of the successful croupier, who laughed and drank meanwhile, intoxicating himself alike with gin and with avaricious joy.

Time passed on.

Several changes of fortune prolonged the game. But luck always returned to the croupier. Fresh bottles of gin went round. The croupier was frightfully drunk.

As for Ned, although he had swallowed a large quantity of spirit, he was as calm as if his glass had held nothing but water.

Four o'clock struck. This was the signal for departure, according to the rule of the house, which was generally submitted to with tolerable alacrity, although with many a seeming grumble.

Ned rose, and passed his arm through that of the croupier.

“They have gold still!” he said to him in an undertone, but distinctly enough for the two friends to hear.

Following this indirect counsel, Valville plunged his hand into his pocket, and allowed the croupier to see between his fingers the gleam of gold.

“Well, Old Mother Sammy’s house is open still,” said the croupier. “If these gentlemen would like . . .”

“I should think so!” said Freedy. “We want to have our revenge yet!”

And they left the tavern together.

They were soon in the narrow street, Ned arm in arm with the croupier. They were alone, having left the house as slowly as possible, in order to let the others disperse.

They were just beneath a gas-lamp when Ned Bark suddenly drew a revolver from his pocket, and placed it immediately under his prisoner's nose.

"Phil Samster!" he said in a stern voice, "resistance is impossible. You must come with us."

This Phil Samster, once a beggar in the docks at New Orleans, was one of Red Ralph's accomplices. On hearing this name Freedy and Valville understood all. And as Phil endeavoured by a violent effort to free himself from the detective's grasp, the revolvers of the two friends quickly made him understand that he could do nothing but submit.

"I'll come with you," he said in a hoarse voice.
"Where are you going to take me?"

"Not far," answered Ned. "You need not be afraid ; we do not want your life."

The robber shrugged his shoulders and walked on, with Ned's grasp still firmly fixed upon his wrist.

CHAPTER XX.

THE END APPROACHES.

THE grey dawn was breaking. Phil Samster, seeing into what hands he had fallen, made no further resistance, but followed his three companions quietly. They proceeded towards the quay by means of the long Tchaptoulas Street, which still preserves its Indian appellation, in the direction of that part of the city which bears the name of Lafayette.

They stood at last on the bank of the Mississippi.

The river seemed all alive. Tall steamers were passing up and down. Travellers were making their way to the railway which winds along the bank, protected by no barrier.

They arrived at last at the foot of a hill where several wooden cabins had been built by pilots, in view of the frequent inundations of the river. Ned Bark directed his steps towards one of these buildings. Standing before it, he drew a key from his pocket and opened the cabin door: a door of somewhat mouldering appearance, but which was really of solid oak and covered with ironwork inside.

When the four men had entered, the door was shut.

They stood in a tolerably large, furnished room.

"Sit down," said Ned Bark to Samster.

The croupier seemed to have made up his mind how to behave. Having recognised Ned Bark, he knew that he was at the mercy of a man who did not easily relax his hold on those who had fallen into his hands. So he obeyed.

Ned Bark advanced to a cupboard which he opened, thus displaying to the astonished eyes of Phil Samster and the others a considerable quantity of provisions. What did it all mean?

"My dear Phil," said Ned Bark, "I wish to show you first of all that I have no evil intentions towards you. If I have brought you here it is because I want to make a bargain with you."

Phil Samster was ready for anything.

"A bargain? just so!" he said. "What's the stake?"

"Your liberty and your life," answered the detective plainly.

"Well, speak; I'm listening."

"You know, Phil, you were sentenced to death for firing the Docks?"

"I know."

"You know too, that, thanks to your comrades and to the complicity of certain traitors in the metropolitan police, you have hitherto escaped from justice?"

"Exactly so."

"And you know also that I, Ned Bark, concern myself very little with party-questions, and although you

may have committed this crime by order of your political chief, I consider you none the less a bandit of whom the country would be well rid?"

"What then?"

"It is well to put the situation clearly before you, so I will go on. I have arrested you without any regular authority, without any legal right at all, I may say; for I ought to have obtained a warrant, which I did not do. So you are not now exactly in the hands of the law, and it depends entirely upon myself whether I do what is necessary or refrain from doing it."

"All quite true. Proceed."

"I will not take you unawares, and I will leave you time for reflection. I am going to ask you some questions; if you answer them I will set you at liberty, reserving to myself the power of nailing you again some other time. . . ."

Phil Samster smiled.

"If I once get out of here you won't catch me again," he began.

"That is our affair. You are the game and I am the hunter. We have each of us our own devices. Now come to the second point; if you do not answer. . . ."

"Well?"

"Well! I have shut you up here; just look round this hut, Samster. You may imagine, from its dilapidated appearance, that you have only to knock over the wooden walls and get out. But I will show you your mistake. You are quite wrong. You may use your fists, your teeth, and your nails for weeks

against these walls without being an inch nearer freedom. Still, as you see, I give you every assistance towards the preservation of your strength. You may stay here, like a fattened ox, with everything at your disposal ; but out you will not come, or, rather, you will come out to tell me everything I want to know, or go and meditate in prison over the foolishness of obstinacy."

"Why, it is a case of sequestration!"

"Exactly so : but a very mild one, for you will want for nothing. Now that you understand me, think it over, and ask yourself whether or not you are inclined to obey me."

Phil Samster looked round him. The room was completely closed, being lighted only from the top, at a height which it would be impossible to reach. He knew Ned Bark, and knew that he never threatened in vain.

"At least," he said, "I ought to know what you want."

"Quite right. I will tell you. You have not forgotten the Battle Field tragedy, the burning of the plantation and the murder of Mr. Valville ?"

Phil bit his lips.

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"As you please. You refuse to answer my first question. Well, good evening ! come, gentlemen," said Ned, rising.

Valville and Freedy followed his example.

"The devil ! One moment," said Samster, who saw that he was fairly trapped, and wanted to retain a chance

of escape. "Of course I have a slight remembrance of the affair, like everybody else."

"Excuse me, not like everybody else, for you must have some personal reminiscence of it. You were there, I think?"

"I?"

"You, yourself, with Red Ralph, with Bloody Foot, with . . ."

"The rascals have denounced me, have they?" cried Phil Samster furiously.

"They or others; at any rate I have been told the truth, have I not?"

"Well, yes . . . I was there . . . but I neither killed nor burned. . . ."

"I am glad to hear it. But you were in the pay of the assassin and the incendiary, and you helped him to carry off a young lady. . . ."

"She went with him of her own free will," muttered the bandit.

"You lie!" cried Valville, unable to restrain his anger.

"You! I've not got to answer you," said Phil, shrugging his shoulders.

"Nevertheless," said Ned softly, imposing silence on Valville by a gesture, "I warn you that this gentleman is the son of the murdered man, and brother of the young lady who has been carried off."

Samster started, and, in spite of himself, turned pale. The situation was a more serious one than he had at first imagined.

"You understand then," said the detective, with his

usual calmness, "that I do not question you in a spirit of idle curiosity. We know that you are not the chief culprit in the affair. You are quite sufficiently embroiled with justice without any superfluous addition to your offences. But in order to sum up your account exactly, we must know its different items. The real criminal is Red Ralph. Tell us where he is and you are free."

Samster rose in his turn and exclaimed roughly—

"I ! turn traitor ? never !"

"Ah, bah ! how scrupulous we are ! You are a thief, an incendiary, an assassin, and yet you have scruples ! As you please, but what you will not tell us you will have to tell the judge, who will be less indulgent to you than we are, for he will remember the fire at the Docks, and by virtue of the sentence there delivered will very soon send you to the gallows."

"But I don't know where Red Ralph is."

"You lie."

"What?"

"I say, and I repeat to you, that you lie, for Red Ralph caused you to be informed of his approaching return to Louisiana."

"That is not true."

"Why should I lie, my good friend?" said Ned, smiling. "Here is a note under his own hand which condemns you."

So saying, Ned drew from his pocket a greasy note-book.

"My note-book !" exclaimed Phil, hurriedly feeling his clothes.

"Yes, indeed your note-book, which I quietly abstracted from your pocket while I was bringing you here, and where I found this, that is to say, a short note written in thieves' dialect, which I will translate as I read."

And Ned Bark read aloud—

"We have escaped pursuit. Prepare the house you know of. Prudence."

"It is true," he added, "that neither date nor any indication of place is given. But you must know from what spot this note has been addressed to you."

Phil Samster was silent.

"At any rate," continued Ned, "mention is made of a house that you know. Tell me where it is and you are free."

"And if not . . . ?"

"If not, you will never leave this place except to go to prison ; I have already said so, and I never fail to keep my word."

Phil Samster's perplexity was evidently very great. Compacts are often made between bandits which they feel bound to respect. Yet the peril was imminent. Phil had escaped all pursuit for two years ; for, as Ned had guessed, the police-officers, in league with the 'carpet-baggers,' had secured his immunity. But if he once fell into the hands of justice he was lost.

Freedy could trace the alternations of internal combat in the bandit's face, at the same time he noticed that Valville's agitation each moment grew greater. The young man's hand was in his pocket, where, no doubt,

he grasped his revolver, in readiness to take swift and sudden vengeance on the robber.

"I have not yet spoken," said Freedy suddenly. "I think that conciliatory methods are best. Let Phil Samster speak, and I will give him on the spot a thousand dollars."

Ned could not repress a shrug of the shoulders. It seemed to him that this was useless prodigality, as he was certain, by means of threats, to lead the bandit to confess.

But the face of Phil Samster suddenly brightened.

"A thousand dollars?" said he, looking curiously at Freedy.

"Here they are, which proves to you that I make no idle promises."

And Phil saw the notes rustling between Freedy's fingers.

The affair became more serious than ever.

"And if I speak," he said, "it is really true—you will pay me?"

"I will pay you at once."

"And I will add another thousand dollars," said Charles, coming to Freedy's aid.

There was no further question as to compact, delicacy of feeling, scruple of any kind that could chain Phil's tongue! Two thousand dollars and liberty! This time he would take care not to be caught again; he would go to the north—to Canada, perhaps—and there lead a joyous life, without any need to fear Red Ralph's resentment.

"Well," said Freedy, "have you decided?"

"Faith, yes; you shall know all."

"One moment," said Ned Bark, whose matter-of-fact brain was always on the alert. "I have delicate feelings too, and I do not wish Phil to accuse me of having taken him prisoner. . . ."

"I am not treating with you, however," began the robber insolently.

"Excuse me; it is I who arranged this conference, therefore I have the honour of warning this gentleman that even when he has given up the secret information which we require, even when he has received the two thousand dollars which have been mentioned, still he will not leave this place."

"What?"

"He will not leave this place," Ned Bark repeated, "for four days at the least."

"Why not?"

"Because, dear sir, your first care would be to inform Red Ralph that we are on his track, so the dollars would be lost, and we should be green enough to let ourselves be tricked like babies."

"I will hold my tongue then," said Phil.

"Ned," said Valville, "you must let us act."

"Not in the very least. Friend Phil will very soon hear reason. He will remain here four days, well lodged and fed; for in that cupboard there is plenty of food and plenty of brandy."

"Of brandy?" exclaimed Samster.

"Yes, indeed, old boy!" said Ned, laughing. "You

see I have forgotten nothing which could render your life agreeable. Yes, brandy and whisky, tobacco, fuel, and everything. Come, Phil, accept our conditions once for all. Two thousand dollars, four days' captivity; after that you may go and get hanged wherever you like and however you like."

Ned was right. It was impossible not to yield on these terms. Only, as Phil was still suspicious, it was necessary—first, that Freedy and Valville should give their word that the arrangement proposed by Ned should be carried out to the letter, and that on the morning of the fifth day Samster should be set free; secondly, that the two thousand dollars should be paid down to him at once.

The treaty being thus ratified, Phil spoke.

While our friends were climbing one side of Devil's Rock, Red Ralph and his accomplices were making way, by underground passages known only to themselves, to a certain spot on the coast, at some miles' distance, where they were secure from any surprise. Phil supposed that Red Ralph had despatched the message from this place. He affirmed that he had not seen any messenger. The letter had been slipped into his hand in a crowd, probably by some 'scalawag,' who was one of Red Ralph's accomplices.

He did not know in the least by what road Ralph would return to Louisiana. But the mission with which he had been entrusted was this. Red Ralph possessed a house, situated in a wood, near the village of Woodville, between Bayou Sara and Natchez, a building

which had several times served as a refuge for the bandits after their adventurous expeditions. It was there that Phil Samster was to await his chief. He had not set off on the previous night, because he lacked funds for the journey, and it was in order to procure some that he had repaired to the gambling-den in which Ned Bark had surprised him. The detective had been on his track for several hours, and had found little difficulty in following up the trail.

He could tell nothing more.

"And now," said he, "give me the dollars and let me alone. Ah! one word more, and it is to Ned Bark that I address it. I think he is enough of a man of honour"—how oddly the words came from the lips of such a ruffian—"not to denounce me to Red Ralph. For," he added, with a sort of shudder, "if he knew that I had betrayed him I should be a dead man."

"Set your mind at rest," said Valville. "You have our promise."

The result, thus gained, of their expedition was very valuable. Thanks to Phil Samster's information, they were certain of surprising Red Ralph at last, and, perhaps, of rescuing his victim.

"Sir," said Valville to the incendiary, "you have committed many crimes, but the service which to-day you are rendering to honest men may in some degree atone for your past life."

Phil shrugged his shoulders. He did not care for that: he had his brandy and his dollars; the rest mattered very little to him.

Ned made himself sure once more that the doors were fastened, and that all chance of escape was impossible ; then he placed within Phil's reach every possible means of relieving the tedium and the solitude of his captivity.

"Good-bye for four days then," were his last words.

The three men left the cabin, and the heavy bar of the outer door fell into its place.

"Now to New Orleans," said Ned. "I don't think we have managed badly. Really, Red Ralph must be the devil himself if he escapes us now. Let us go and reassure the friends who are waiting for you, whom your long absence must have disquieted, and then let us be off to Woodville."

"Do you notice," said Freedy, "that we have obtained an explanation of that letter, the fragments of which were found in poor Jeanne's retreat? Had she not heard a name uttered which began with the syllable 'Wood'?"

"True," said Valville, "I have some hope at last. My poor sister, how much she must have suffered ! How much care and tenderness we owe her to make her forget her miseries!"

The three men made their way very rapidly to New Orleans.

There a carriage conducted them to M. Blanchemont's house.

Lucile was gazing out of the window. When she saw her brother and Doctor Freedy appear, she pressed her hand to her heart and turned deathly pale.

But no one dies of joy. She had passed a night of agony, thinking of her brother, and also of her brother's

friend, whom she feared that she might never see again. Madame Longpré had not quitted her side, and had received her whole confidence. She smiled therefore with a slightly mischievous air when the young girl held out her hand to Charles, with scarcely a glance at Freedy, and said—

“How unkind it was of you, Charles, to make us all so anxious!”

Ned Bark was invited to join the family repast. At first he refused decidedly to do so, for this is a peculiarly French custom. Any one who renders a service to a Frenchman becomes his friend. But Ned Bark found this difficult to understand. He was a paid servant. If he rendered any service he was only earning his wages. And yet—American though he was—if he had seriously and carefully questioned himself he might have discovered that he, the detective, had begun to feel positive affection for those whom he was resolute in considering only as his employers, and that he was now expending in their business far more interest and emotion than was at all necessary for the completion of a mere bargain.

It was decided that they should start for Woodville that very evening. It was an expedition which might prove dangerous, for they were about to stand face to face with the bandits, and would probably have to lay siege in good earnest to the house before they took possession of it.

Ned promised his friends the help of two men for whom he could vouch. Valville, Freedy, and Sambo

were ready to start. Thus their force consisted of six determined well-armed men, all the stronger—as M. Blanchemont said—because they were upholding a good cause.

M. Blanchemont, however, hazarded one objection.

“Why not apply to the regular police? Why not call in the aid of the military?”

Ned grew somewhat impatient.

“Because, as I have said a hundred times, the regular police, as you call them, have lately been irregular enough to ally themselves with all these brigands, and we should have treachery to fear.”

They adhered, therefore, to their first plan.

How should they reach Bayou Sara? There is no railway line extending the whole length of the Mississippi. The trains from New Orleans go to the west of Vermilion and Opelousas, and it is only at the latter station that a branch line to Bâton-Rouge can be found. From Bâton-Rouge one must go by water to Bayou Sara, whence there is a short railway line to Woodville. A journey thus made would be long and complicated. On the other hand, the steamers which navigate the Mississippi stop at a great number of stations in order to take travellers or goods on board.

“Our best way,” said Freedy, “would be to engage the services of the captain of some little steamer, which would then be entirely at our own disposal, and would accomplish the distance in a very short time.”

Money will indeed do everything, and fortunately our friends were rich.

At sunset, therefore, they stepped on board a lightly-

built steamer with a flat keel, and at the sound of a bell the engines began to work, while Alice and Lucile stood on the bank with full hearts, and waved their handkerchiefs in token of farewell to the men who were once more about to risk their lives.

Even the woman with the iron will had tears in her eyes!

Ned Bark had kept his word. Two Georgians of colossal size had been introduced by the detective, and were ready for vigorous action.

The little band was full of confidence.

"At last we approach the end," said Valville. "The time seems long. I want to stand face to face with Red Ralph, and punish him as he deserves for the misery he has caused."

Meanwhile the vessel, flinging high into the air its jet of steam, glided swiftly down the waters of the Father of Rivers.

When a traveller finds himself for the first time in sight of the Mississippi, he is apt to experience a feeling of disappointment.

But a contrary feeling arises little by little within him, and his admiration increases by degrees. The more one sees and knows of the country around this mighty river the greater becomes one's appreciation of its grandeur and beauty.

It was first discovered in 1672, but its true source was not known before the explorations of Schoolcraft, who, in 1832, announced that it rose in a small lake, called by the French Lake La Biche, but generally known as Lake

Itasca. This lake is a fine sheet of water, irregular in form, and eight miles in length, situated amidst wood-covered hills and fed by fresh-water springs. Its waters form a cascade at one end, and here the Mississippi is born. The lake is about fifteen hundred feet above the level of the sea, and more than two thousand miles from the Gulf of Mexico.

The river drains an extent of country which is unequalled for beauty and fertility. The territory, called the valley of the Mississippi, extends as far south as the Gulf of Mexico; east, to the Alleghany Mountains, and west, to the Rocky Mountains. The length of its course is two thousand four hundred miles.

The Mississippi is navigable by steam-vessels, with but slight interruption, as far as the falls of St. Anthony, at a distance of about four hundred miles from its source. Its course is extremely tortuous, and détours of twenty or thirty miles are frequently necessary in order to accomplish a distance which could easily be traversed, as the crow flies, in two hours. In other places, the distance is, on the contrary, shortened by means of narrow canals called 'cut-offs,' through which the water rushes with so violent a current that the earth on each side is torn away, and a stream quite sufficiently large for the passage of steamboats is speedily formed. What renders navigation difficult is the existence of enormous mounds of earth, surmounted by trees, which are detached from the banks by the force of the water, and which, like floating islands, form obstacles well-nigh insurmountable.

Sometimes, also, great banks of mud rise to the surface of the water, and occasion many a shipwreck. These mud-banks are called in the special dialect of the place, 'snags' or 'sawyers.' They are generally as round in form as if their shape had been traced by the point of a compass.

On leaving New Orleans, the first station of any importance is Plaquemine, in the parish of Iberville. It is situated near the mouth of the Plaquemine Bayou, twenty-three miles south of Bâton-Rouge. Before the war, enormous quantities of cotton used to be transported from this point to New Orleans.

Aster Plaquemine comes Bâton-Rouge, the ancient capital of Louisiana. It is one of the wealthiest towns in that part of the country. It contains a college, an arsenal, and barracks.

It is said that the name of Bâton-Rouge was first given to this place because at the very spot where its earliest inhabitants built their huts there stood a red-barked cypress-tree of immense bulk and height, but entirely bare of branches. One of the settlers observed to a companion that this tree would make a splendid cane. And from this simple joke the name of Bâton-Rouge was given to the town. The story may perhaps be true.

The next landing-place is at Port Hudson, which was attacked in 1863 by General Banks, and surrendered to the Northern troops in July, after the news of the fall of Vicksburg.

Our friends disembarked at Bayou Sara.

Thence they went by train to Woodville.

And on the morning of the following day they entered the woods, in the midst of which, according to Phil Samster's instructions, they hoped to find the house belonging to Red Ralph.

CHAPTER XXI.

PUNISHMENT.

WOODVILLE, a small industrial town, has, it seems, gained for itself the right of inserting its name on the map of the United States. Yet it is neither a hamlet nor a village, but a manufacturing place, where hundreds of workmen in iron show how much needed was the short railway line which runs to Bayou Sara and connects the interior of the country with the Mississippi.

Woodville means a town in the woods. Therefore some resolution is necessary on the part of a tourist who knows that such a town exists and wishes to reach it, for it is completely hidden by the surrounding forests. Yet Woodville may congratulate itself on standing in a very pleasant situation.

The Blue River, descending from the hills and spreading itself abroad upon the plain until it loses itself in numerous streams which are almost rivers in themselves, expands near the town of Woodville into a sort of lake, bordered by manufactories and ironworks. A canal has been constructed from the Mississippi to the Blue River, in order to facilitate the arrival of vessels at Woodville. The river presents the appearance of a large basin, and

recalls, in miniature, the view of the Thames from London Bridge. From the enormous chimneys a dark fog hovers over the town, which is noisy with incessant activity. A bridge crosses the water ; and, to continue the comparison, the dome of St. Bartholomew, surmounted by a cross, rises in the distance, and brings to mind the great dome of St. Paul's.

If it were not for the railway, for an almost impracticable road, and for the Blue River quays, it would seem as if the inhabitants of Woodville disdained to open communications with any other part of the world.

The town is surrounded with a broad belt of verdure, as on all sides of it arise great forests of trees of every kind. This part of Louisiana seems to retain all the peculiarities of the Mexican flora. From the bay-cinnamon tree, the bark of which produces an aromatic oil, from the pyramid-shaped clove-tree and the shaddock, whose branches form a refuge for a magnificently beautiful butterfly, to the magnolia, developed in vigorous splendour unknown in France, the baobab tree, with deeply-cleft leaves extending over an area of more than forty or fifty feet, and the white hazel, whose rugged bark resembles an alligator's skin, everything grows in wild luxuriance, and forms a strong firmly-planted fence which no human labour has yet pierced through.

There are no paths. The royal palm-tree, the sturdy oak, the banyan, and the date-tree interlace their branches, until they look like reptiles doing battle in the air.

It was into this labyrinth that our friends had plunged.

Perhaps it would have been wise to secure a guide. For what did they know? Only that Red Ralph possessed, somewhere in these solitudes, a place of refuge carefully concealed from every one. Certainly Phil Samster had given them directions, which, from afar, seemed most precise. But in the midst of this maze of trees, would it be possible to pursue the track that he had indicated?

But Freedy and Valville had not hesitated. To take a guide was only a way of exposing themselves to fresh treachery. Ned Bark finally agreed with them.

They went forward, therefore, rather by chance, attentively listening to the slightest sounds, each man carrying a loaded gun in his hand.

For this time they knew that the combat was for life or death.

Several hours passed in fruitless search. None of them felt fatigue. But a slight feeling of discouragement arose in every heart. Had Samster deceived them?

Certainly it seemed as if he had had every motive for speaking the truth, since his liberty and his life depended upon the success of his enemies' enterprise. But who could boast of having clearly read the robber's heart?

It was quite possible that, at the moment when they least expected it, there might arise any one of those complications which set all warnings at defiance and put to confusion the best-considered schemes.

The sun was touching the horizon. In an hour it would be dark.

By the aid of the compass, however, our friends were certain of being able to regain Woodville.

But none of them uttered a word about turning back.

There was a sort of general presentiment felt amongst them that the crisis was approaching. In spite of the failure of their search amongst the thicknesses of the dark forest, they felt a sensation of confidence which no discouragement could overcome.

"If necessary," Valville had said, "we will spend the night in the wood."

"As you please," Freedy had replied.

Ned Bark was equally determined not to abandon the contest.

"At the point where we stand now," he said, "the least delay, the least hesitation, may ruin everything. Who knows whether Red Ralph will not merely touch at his house near Woodville, and then drag his victim to more remote districts? We must wait for him at all risks, seize him, force him even by violence to obey us."

The night closed in. Nothing is stranger than the impression produced by the gathering of the evening shadows in a wood. And what a wood was this! There was no opening through which a ray of light could penetrate. A dome of darkness seemed gradually to settle down upon the traveller. First the leaves began to lose their distinctness, until they looked like crayon-drawings.

Then the darker lines of the branches alone stood out in black outline. Then it seemed as if leaves and branches alike became confused, intermingled, lost. A black platform was built up by degrees above the heads of the wayfarers.

In the gleam of the fading twilight, Ned Bark had again consulted the notes which he had made of Phil Samster's confessions. It was impossible, if the ruffian had told the truth, that they could be far from the spot indicated. But where was this accursed house? Hidden in a ravine? Concealed by a grove of trees on the summit of a hill? No answer could be given to this question.

"Let us trust to chance," said Freedy. "Let us remain here, but no one must sleep. We will place sentinels at the different points which give access to the spot where we are, and then we will wait for Providence to direct us."

"It is the wisest way," said Ned Bark. "Either Red Ralph has already gained his retreat in these solitudes, and will have to come out of it, or he has not yet arrived; and how prudent soever his attendants may be, it will be impossible for them not to betray themselves, if only by some rustling of the branches. The first supposition is highly improbable. We have made such haste that Red Ralph could scarcely have been before us. The second case is much the more likely one. Let us wait."

Not one of them felt any desire for sleep.

The men whom Ned Bark had hired, stimulated by the prospect of a high reward, were only too anxious to prove their zeal.

As for the others, they were seized with that fever which sometimes precedes the taking of decisive steps. Ned Bark had the honour of his profession at heart. He wished to succeed. Valville thought of his dead father and his lost sister. Freedy could not forget that at New Orleans there were two lovely eyes which would thank him for his efforts by their gentle glances.

And it was not Freedy the impassible who was the least moved of the party.

Ned Bark's two acolytes were placed on guard. They were used to forest solitudes, and their ears were quick to catch the faintest passing sounds. Ten years before they had been engaged in the last contest with the Indians.

Sambo, apparently indifferent, was stretched upon the ground. But his ear touched the earth. He was ready to give the alarm.

Ned, Freedy, and Valville, leaning against tree-trunks, waited with the immobility of statues. As each hour passed, Ned Bark uttered a few words concerning the time, and the others replied, thus showing that they were not yet overcome by sleep.

That was all.

It was already eleven o'clock. Nothing unusual had been heard or seen.

Suddenly Ned started. No one noticed his movement. His forehead contracted, his one eye gleamed with a singular lustre. Suddenly he turned round, and, with the rapidity of a machine worked by a spring, bounded into the midst of the thicket.

A stifled groan was heard.

Nothing more. A few seconds passed in silence.

Then Ned Bark reappeared.

"Up!" he said in a low tone. "I have caught one!"

Scarcely had he said these words when a shot was heard.

One of the sentinels had just discharged his gun at a black form which he had seen creeping through the shadows.

Then came a sort of general rush forward. Each of our six acquaintances found himself confronted by an adversary. It was easy to tell, on such a night, that these newcomers were adversaries indeed.

For men who would adventure themselves in this manner in almost impracticable woods were almost sure to be bandits. Therefore Valville and his companions did not hesitate to throw themselves upon the persons whom they saw.

Blows were interchanged, and balls sped hither and thither. But the men thus suddenly attacked did not seem disposed to sustain a long conflict. Disengaging themselves from their assailants, those who were unwounded took to flight with surprising swiftness, considering how nearly impossible it was to thread the labyrinth.

Out of the troop which had attacked Valville's men, three remained prostrate on the ground.

One of them had had his chest pierced by the ball of a revolver. He gave no sign of life.

The second, who had fought with Freedy, had had his forehead laid open by a knife, and was insensible.

The third, upon whom Ned Bark had thrown himself, was safe and sound in life and limb. The detective had, in a second, tied his hands and feet so securely that during the combat he had been utterly unable to move.

"Here is the man who will guide us to the place," said the detective. "Come! it is useless to hide ourselves. War has been declared. Let us light the torches."

In a few moments Ned Bark's order had been executed. The glossy leaves reflected the lights a thousandfold. Not one of Valville's six men had been wounded.

Ned Bark forced his prisoner to stand upright, and pushed him into the circle.

"Listen to me," he said. "You see this"—and he showed him a revolver—"and this." 'This' was a purse, through the meshes of which the gold pieces glittered brightly. "You may choose . . . money, or a ball through the head. You see, the situation lies before you."

The prisoner was a short, fat man, with starting eyes; one of those wretches who, in their poverty, hire themselves at any price to any man for any cause.

"What do you want of me?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

"Tell us where you were going with your companions."

"To rejoin our chief."

"That is Red Ralph, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"What were you going to do when you had joined him?"

"Get our money; he has made us wait for it a long time."

"That is clear enough, and we will put your frankness down to your account. Now we come to the decisive question—What had Red Ralph promised you?"

"Twenty dollars."

"This purse contains fifty. If you like, it shall be yours."

"What am I do?"

"Lead us to your chief's retreat."

The man started, and a livid pallor covered his face. It could be seen that the very idea of treachery caused him profound terror.

"What do you fear?" Ned Bark asked.

"The chief will kill me."

"Yes, if you fall into his hands. But you may be sure that if you tell us the secret which we wish to know, you will have nothing more to fear from him."

For an instant the man gazed at the faces around him.

He understood two things at once.

First, that these were honest men, and that if they sought Red Ralph, it was in order to punish him for his crimes.

Secondly, that they were courageous and well armed, and that their success was possible.

"I accept your terms," he said.

"At last!" exclaimed Valville. "Let us lose no time."

"I make one condition," said the man.

"What?" asked Ned Bark sternly. "Make haste to speak, for we may yet remember that you are only a brigand, and Red Ralph's accomplice."

"I will guide you to the place where you will find him. It is a house in the depths of the forest, called Green House. But, after I have shown it to you, you must let me go."

"That is to say that you are afraid we shall not capture Red Ralph, and that then he may think of vengeance?"

"Supposing that it is so, have I your promise?"

Now, that Ned Bark and his companions were on Red Ralph's track, they cared very little for the capture of this inferior accomplice of the bandit.

"You may go then; we promise it."

"Then follow me."

"But don't forget that I have my eye on you," added Ned Bark, "and that at the slightest sign of treachery I shall blow your brains out."

As they were about to set out, the man who had been wounded and whom the midnight coolness had revived drew himself into a sitting posture, and cried out to his old companion—

"Judas! Coward! You are selling us!"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"He is sorry that you did not apply to him," he murmured in Ned Bark's ear.

While the little troop made its way through the thickets, Freedy turned to Valville.

"Do you remember," he said, "the Indian who preferred death to the possibility of treason?"

"I have never forgotten him. That man was truly brave."

"Well! compare the two. See what civilisation does for those to whom it gives no morality. The guilty savage guards his point of honour; the civilised bandit has not even the elements of moral sense."

"Is it a long way?" Ned asked of the guide.

"In less than half an hour you will reach Green House."

"But what is to prove that you are not leading us into some ambuscade?"

"My own interest," replied the robber cynically. "If you were attacked, the assailants' balls would strike friend and foe alike. My life would be imperilled; whilst now I risk nothing, unless you are cheating me and do not give me the promised sum."

"You know that you have nothing to fear."

They were now mounting a height. The brushwood around them grew thicker and thicker, and walking became extremely difficult.

The man—forestalling a question from Ned Bark—said to him—

"This is not the way that the others took. If they are awaiting you, it will be on the other side of the hill."

Suddenly a voice cried—

"Who goes there?"

"Put out the torches," said Ned.

Utter darkness reigned in the woods.

"Before you, over that hedge, lies Green House."

"Well, wait a moment," said Ned.

He threw himself on the ground, and began to crawl towards the place indicated by the bandit.

There, through the darkness, he could see the blackish mass of a building surrounded with trees.

He returned and unloosed the robber's bonds.

"You are free," he said. "There is the money. Go."

The man thrust the purse into his belt.

"One piece of advice," he said. "We were twenty; you are six. Take care."

At the enumeration of their men, Ned could not repress a slight start. But at the same instant the report of a gun was heard, and balls began to whistle round the little troop, cutting and tearing the boughs and trunks beside them.

"Forward!" cried Ned Bark, "and God protect us!"

They rushed forward. Quickly they crossed the thick hedge which separated them from the open space in which Green House was standing. It was a sort of hut, two storeys high, built of the trunks of trees, and having one large window, now brilliantly lighted.

Shoulder to shoulder, the six men dashed upon the dark shadows grouped in front of the house, without waiting to fire. Surprised by this unforeseen attack, the bandits faltered at first, and some of them lost their footing. The others, however, soon regained their self-possession, and bullets again whistled through the air.

One of the attacking party fell. It was one of Ned Bark's men.

The combat grew fiercer and more terrible ; it was a hand-to-hand contest in which each blow told.

Freedy had seized his gun by the barrel, and was using its butt-end as a club.

Suddenly Valville, carried away by fury, cried out—

“ Where are you hiding, Red Ralph ? ”

The window was thrown violently open.

“ Is it Charles Valville who speaks ? ”

“ Myself ! Ah ! you are there, ruffian ! Well, then ! . . . ”

He discharged his gun at the form which had appeared at the window.

But the passion that moved him caused his arm to swerve aside.

Red Ralph’s voice resounded once more through the night. He called to his companions—

“ Stop fighting, and let these men come in to me.”

The ascendancy exercised by the bandit over his accomplices was strange indeed. At his order they ceased the combat, and turned towards the door of the hut.

Charles advanced to it resolutely.

Ned Bark laid his hand on the young man’s arm.

“ Take care,” said he, “ Once inside that house, and you are in his power.”

It might have been thought that Red Ralph had heard these words, although uttered in so low a voice, for suddenly the door opened, and he appeared upon the threshold alone. And, so great is the effect of courage when displayed even by the most hardened criminal,

that Valville, who had his revolver in his hand, involuntarily lowered his arm.

"Enter," said Red Ralph. "And you, men, retire. Remember that you will answer with your heads for the lives of these men."

Then, re-entering the house, he signed to Valville and his companions to follow him.

We may perhaps recall the slight sketch of the bandit's appearance traced by Valville after his first encounter with Red Ralph in the Island of Anastasia.

"A man of high stature," he had said, "with stern features, and a countenance full of savage energy."

Was this the same man who now appeared before him?

The tall form was bent, as if the weight of misfortune, perhaps of remorse, had lain heavy upon him; on his features, worn, weary, sunken, there was a shadow of dejection and sinister resignation.

He turned to Valville.

"Now," he said, "you may kill me."

"Not before you have spoken, wretched man; I have no false generosity. Yes, I would have your life," cried Valville with redoubled fury, "for you are my father's murderer! But before anything else, you must give me back the beloved sister whom you have so basely carried away from us!"

There was a silence.

Red Ralph passed his hand over his forehead, and then said in a trembling voice—

"My life belongs to you, but I am no longer able to restore to you her whom you seek."

"What do you mean? Take care; my patience is at an end."

"I tell you that your sister is not in my power . . ."

"What! You are deceiving me!"

He fixed his burning glance on Red Ralph's face. A sudden desolating thought crossed his mind.

"Dead!" he cried. "She is dead! and you have killed her!"

"No, no!" said Red Ralph with vehemence, "I swear that I never touched her!"

"Where is she, then?"

"Your sister has disappeared."

"You lie!"

"She disappeared on the day after I escaped from your pursuit, at the foot of Devil's Rock!"

Ned, Freedy, and Valville were terrified. They would have been glad to believe that this story was a lie. But the bandit's accent of despair, the agony of his expression, showed that he spoke the truth.

"Look at me," said Red Ralph sadly, "and you will understand why I renounce the contest. Yes—I committed a crime—but I have told you already, it was because a mad unconquerable passion had taken possession of me, and to vanquish the resistance that maddened me, I bent before her, I knelt at her very knees. At other times, beside myself, I threatened her with death; but her implacable contempt pursued me always—always; yet all the tortures I suffered are nothing to those that rend my heart now."

"She has disappeared!" exclaimed Ned Bark. "But how? under what circumstances?"

"Do I know myself? We left Devil's Rock—can you tell why? Because I did not wish to fight—not from cowardice, you will not imagine that!—but because I feared that the brother of the woman whom I loved would fall, and that his corpse would prove another barrier between herself and me. By almost impassable roads, known only to myself, I regained the seashore,—we passed one last night in Florida; there, in a spacious cavern, I had arranged a shelter for her. But that night I slept not: dark presentiments disturbed my rest. I had already sent by one of my men an order that this house should be prepared, for here I wished to make one crowning effort. In the morning, when I gave the word for departure, your sister did not appear. I had never penetrated to her chamber, but that day I resolved on doing so. Woe is me! in the night she had escaped. How? I have never been able to understand. Ah! what I felt was both rage and despair! In vain I sent my men in all directions; in vain I searched the whole neighbourhood, even to the most inaccessible heights! That is why I tell you I cannot give you back your sister. Kill me if you like."

There was no room for doubt. This story must be true!

New agonies of suspense and anxiety thrilled the hearts of Valville and his friends.

"You offer me your life," said Valville. "I will not murder you. You have arms, you may defend yourself."

"So be it," said Red Ralph.

A moment later the two men found themselves face to face, at a distance of twenty feet from each other, in the wide space in front of Green House.

"Listen," said Red Ralph to his men. "I have paid you. If I die, you will find in the house a considerable sum of money. Divide it among yourselves. Now, whatever happens, remember that the man against whom I am about to risk my life is to be sacred for you—the man himself, and all who accompany him."

A murmur of assent was heard.

The torches were relighted. The scene was striking, and at the same time intensely sad.

"Are you ready?" asked Freedy.

"Ready," answered the two men.

The American clapped his hands three times.

At the third blow a shot was heard.

Red Ralph threw out his arms, and fell, face forward to the ground. Valville's bullet had pierced his heart.

The bandits pressed round him.

"Dead!" said one of them. "Go, gentlemen, you are free."

With shoulders bowed, and faces pale, Valville and his companions turned away from Green House.

The Battle Field planter was avenged.

But Jeanne? his daughter! Alas, she had doubtless met with a frightful death in the solitudes of Florida.

CHAPTER XXII.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

NEXT morning the little band embarked at Bayou Sara.

Few words were interchanged during the sad journey.

Notwithstanding his energy, Ned Bark now found himself destitute of the confidence which he had hitherto exhibited.

An accident to their steamer forced them to stop at some leagues' distance from New Orleans. Fortunately, America is covered with a network of telegraphic wires, and it was possible for them to announce their return to the Blanchemonts' house.

They hired horses, and were sure of reaching the town in two or three hours by a cross road.

Ned went first, probably in order that he might reflect at his ease upon the chances which still remained to them. As his one eye was endowed with the faculty of piercing sight, he perceived at some distance from their party a person who was riding towards them from an opposite direction. The horse and rider seemed to strike him peculiarly.

He allowed a host of contradictory exclamations to escape him.

“Yes? no! it is impossible! and yet! . . .”

And then Ned Bark, who was of an essentially inquisitive nature, determined to solve the problem which so deeply perplexed him.

He spurred forward his horse and galloped up to the person in question, without much regarding the chance of a fall over a precipice near the road, where a torrent dashed wildly down the rocks.

But when he was but a few yards from the man he uttered an exclamation.

“Good heavens!” he cried.

“Good morning, Mr. detective!” said a laughing voice.

“The deuce! it is he himself! it is you! impossible!”

And the worthy detective, who was not easily moved, found himself stirred by singular emotion, for the man whom he had just recognised was no other than the fop Parisian, Eusèbe, in flesh and blood, and not dead at all.

The detective had taken a great fancy to the brave, reckless lad, who had really given signs of true courage and self-devotion.

“But this is not to be believed,” exclaimed Ned. “Where do you come from? Where have you been?”

“You shall hear all the details, my old Vidocq,” replied Eusèbe. “I am like a cat, I always fall on my feet. But wait awhile; where are the others?”

“Behind; see, here they are.”

And, in fact, anxious to know what had become of the

detective, the friends had urged their horses to their utmost speed.

In another moment Eusèbe was beside them.

What exclamations followed ! His reappearance caused great delight to Freedy and Valville. Indeed, Freedy, the phlegmatic, leaned over to Eusèbe and fairly embraced him with both arms, while Charles nearly crushed his hands with squeezing them.

Then all manner of questions had to be asked.

"What had happened to him ? Why had he left the band at Devil's Rock ?"

"My little lambs," said Eusèbe, with his most malicious air of fun, "you must allow me to tell you, that at the receipt of your telegram . . ."

"What ! you are at the Blanchemonts' house ?"

"As safe as a barndoar fowl."

"How long have you been there ?"

"Since last night."

"This is really wonderful ; but tell us . . ."

"Please let me finish my sentence. I was telling you that at the receipt of your telegram I left my breakfast behind to come and meet you ; that I am dying of hunger ; and that when my appetite claims satisfaction, I cannot bear to hear myself speak : whence this conclusion—after the first course I shall be at your service. And calm yourselves, for the far-famed Robinson Crusoe, who wrote a pretty little volume of about three hundred pages, with illustrations, met with no adventures that can in the least be compared to mine !"

"You were not wounded ?"

"Nor killed : no, as you see. All the same, I will not tell you a word. Oh, I have surprises for you ! such surprises ! enough to make you gape with wonder for the rest of your lives, which, I hope, may be long."

They could not extract any further information from him. He had a curiously joyous look ; and beneath each of his words they could discern a mysterious reticence ; for although he declared that he would not speak, it was easy for the most unobservant person to guess that he was burning to tell them some great piece of news.

Twenty times or more he repeated the same phrases, with the Parisian accent which was the pride of his heart.

"You will be surprised ! you will be surprised, every one of you !"

In fact he was a little too cheerful ; and observing that Valville's face grew gloomy, he added—

"By the way, did your expedition through the woods succeed ?"

"No," said Charles, laconically, somewhat irritated by this tone of exaggerated gaiety.

"Ah, bah ! a bad thing ! what ! nothing at all ? and you never met the worthy Red Ralph ?"

"Ralph is dead," said Freedy.

This time Eusèbe looked grave.

"Well done," he said ; "for, between ourselves, he was a rough customer."

"My dear Eusèbe," said Valville, rather drily, "you know that we are very glad to see you again safe and

sound ; but allow me to tell you that your merriment is somewhat out of place. You forget that my poor sister, Jeanne, has disappeared ; and that . . . ”

He could not complete his sentence ; for Eusèbe bent forward as if he wished to hide the expression of his countenance, and interrupted him quickly—

“ Ah ! just so ! you want to lecture Coco ? Then I’ll be off.”

And he galloped away, spurring on his horse as he left them.

Freedy and Valville looked at each other. Had Eusèbe gone mad ?

Yet, without confessing it, they felt some curiosity, augmented by each moment’s delay, to know what had happened, and the word ‘surprise,’ emphasized by Eusèbe, rang in their anxious ears.

They put their horses to a gallop and soon arrived at the town. Without stopping they turned into Canal Street, and drew bridle only when they had reached the Blanchemonts’ house.

Scarcely had they dismounted when the hall doors were flung widely open.

A cry of surprise, indeed, escaped their lips ; for the servants and negroes, dressed in holiday garb, were all drawn up to meet them, and the walls and doors were half hidden beneath decorations of leaves and flowers.

The steward opened the drawing-room door and drew back to let the newcomers pass in.

The room was empty.

“ What is the matter ? ” cried Valville.

"This is the surprise!" exclaimed Eusèbe's voice.

And the young man reappeared, with his sister Alice, Madame Longpré, and all the Blanchemont family.

"Charles," said Alice to her lover, "you have been strong in bearing sorrow, can you also be strong in bearing joy?"

Charles turned pale: all the blood seemed to leave his face.

"Ah, speak!" he cried; "for mercy's sake, tell me what all this means."

Then the door of another room opened, and two young girls appeared, with arms entwined around each other's waists. The first was Lucile.

But who was the other?

"Jeanne! my dearest Jeanne!" exclaimed Charles, and, rushing forward, he pressed his sister in his arms.

"Don't you think I have given you a surprise after all?" cried Eusèbe.

Yes, it was Jeanne herself, alive and well.

Overwhelmed with emotion, Valville sank down upon a sofa, scarcely able to speak or stand.

"Yes, I am here," said Jeanne. "And first of all, let me tell you, Charles, that the happiness of seeing each other again is due to . . . to . . . him!"

'To him?' She meant Coco, the Parisian dandy.

And, in spite of all his assurance, Eusèbe turned as red as a turkey-cock, and murmured—

"It's true—a little; but I must say that a good deal is owing to yourself, Mademoiselle."

"Come to the dining-room," said M. Blanchemont, "and there Jeanne and Eusèbe will tell us all."

Is there any sight more beautiful, or more touching, than that of the first family meal taken in common by the members of a family reunited after a long and bitter separation? How many events, how many fears and sorrows had torn the hearts of these men and women since last they met together.

And their stories! They had to be told and compared before they could seem possible, for their details were curiously intermixed and entangled.

Jeanne had suffered much; and yet, as she frankly owned, the man Red Ralph had retained some traces of noble feeling within him. He had threatened her a hundred times, but a word, a look, had been sufficient to quell him. He had given way to unbridled excesses of rage resembling madness, and again he had seemed to be afraid and ashamed of himself.

"And still," Jeanne added, "I was always doubtful whether his passions would not carry him too far. I lived in perpetual fear. Ah, those sleepless nights when I heard this man, who also did not sleep, prowling round my cave like a wild beast!"

"At last I gathered, from a few words dropped in my hearing, that you were in pursuit of him. That day I gave myself up for lost. There was a frightful, terrible scene between us. Yet once more I conquered; but then he forced me away from Devil's Rock. I felt that he was no longer master of himself; I despaired, felt that I was lost, and resolved at all hazards to escape.

How I managed to quit the cave where he had placed me, how it was that they did not find me, I cannot tell. It seems like a miracle to me now !

"When I felt the free air blow upon my brow I think I went mad. I ran forward through the darkness—anywhere—knocking against the trees and slipping over the rocks. Once I lost my balance and should have fallen down a precipice but for a timely hand that seized and saved me—your brother's hand, Alice."

"Ah, my friend, my brother!" cried Valville, seizing Eusèbe's hand.

"All the same," said Eusèbe, "you were going to treat me in very peculiar manner just now, because I looked a little bit too cheerful."

"Forgive me."

"Perhaps . . . if you are good."

"But how did it happen, my dear Eusèbe," asked Freedy, "that chance led you so opportunely to Mademoiselle Jeanne's aid?"

"In this way," said Eusèbe. "I must tell you I had a grudge against the detective . . ."

"Against me?" said Ned Bark, laughing.

"Yes, indeed! You always looked as if you were laughing at me, as if I didn't make enough show; so I resolved to play you a trick in my own way."

"How?"

"In this way—I, Eusebius the Great, would find her whom you thought you could discover by yourselves; so I took my walking-stick and set off on a little tour in the neighbourhood. But I turned to the right and to the

left, and I went straight on, and I soon lost myself completely. You may perhaps think that I was frightened. I had good reason to be so since I set foot on this land of Vespuce—I will not vex the shade of Christopher Columbus by mentioning his name. But I said to myself: ‘I have learned that if one goes straight on one will always reach some place or other, even in America.’ So off I set again—I don’t know where. Between ourselves, I may mention that this country sadly lacks two things—newspapers and restaurants. I won’t positively swear that I did not swallow a sort of live frog which I mistook for a fruit!

“I went on and on, with watchful eyes and wary footsteps. Night came. I swung myself up into a tree, after having addressed to any snakes that might be in the neighbourhood a touchingly-worded request that they would leave me alone. I was suddenly awakened by a rustling of branches. I looked and saw a black form, and I said to myself, ‘There’s a policeman. I’ll ask him the way.’ I slipped down from my tree, and—the black form made a false step and nearly fell. I picked it up, and it was—Mademoiselle! And really, I am quite pleased with what I have done!”

The brave lad laughed again. But his gaiety was somewhat forced, and a tear was standing in his eye.

“How did you get back to Louisiana?”

“Ah, brother,” said Jeanne, “M. Eusèbe cannot tell you himself that it would have been impossible for anyone to show more courage, more devotion, more patience

than he did. When my strength failed he spoke to me of those I loved, and he provided for all my wants with marvellous skill . . . ”

“I made you eat very nasty things sometimes,” said Eusèbe.

“Monsieur Eusèbe,” said the girl, fixing her big clear eyes on Eusèbe’s face, “please do not interrupt me. I will say what I think, and that is, that you are the best of friends and the most courageous of men.”

“Good! I shall have the Monthyon prize for bravery —twelve hundred francs and a medal.”

“No; only the hearty thanks of a woman who will never forget that she owes her life to you. In short, we made our way to the St. John’s River, where we found a vessel that brought us to Picolata. The way hither was easy. And that is how, dear Charles, we have the delight of seeing each other once again.”

In spite of his modesty, Eusèbe was the hero of the day. Freedy almost envied him. Valville gave a short account of his adventures at Green House; but when he told the manner of Red Ralph’s death, Jeanne said :—

“Forgive him, he has expiated his crime.”

Little yet remains for us to tell in order to bring the story to a close.

The friends—to which rank Ned Bark was elevated at once—soon recovered from the effects of their long and dreary expeditions.

Charles Valville married Alice Lodier. Two other marriages were celebrated on the same day.

One of them, as our readers will have foreseen, was that of Freedy with Lucile.

The other—but we have given it the title of the concluding ceremony too early—was really only the betrothal of Jeanne and Eusèbe.

Yes, of Eusèbe, who had renounced his peculiarly coloured trousers and waistcoat, and was beginning to grow more thoughtful, although he had not lost his inexhaustible fund of gaiety.

A journey followed this betrothal and the weddings.

They made a pilgrimage to Devil's Rock in Florida, where Jeanne and Alice, in company with those whom they loved, recalled their former sorrowful experiences of the place.

But the sun was shining on the rocks and torrents, and Nature was so beautiful that the friends could smile there, even while remembering the past.

One person remains whose end we ought to know.

When Ned Bark, true to his word, repaired to the house in which Phil Samster had been detained, he found nothing but a heap of ashes and cinders. In a fit of drunken frenzy the wretched man must have set fire to the building and perished in the flames.

The incendiary had met with a death worthy of himself.

Eusèbe's betrothal has ended in a marriage.

As it is given to no man to be perfect, he has again, since his arrival in Paris, attended faithfully all theatrical performances.

But it is right to say that Jeanne is always at his side, that he adores her, and that she has completed his education.

He has sobered down now, and wears no colours but grey and black !

THE END.

DEVLIN THE BARBER

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

AUTHOR OF "THE NINE OF HEARTS," "GREAT PORTER SQUARE,"
ETC. ETC.

FOURTH EDITION.

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DEVLIN THE BARBER

INTRODUCTION.

IN WHICH REFERENCE IS MADE TO A STRANGE, UNFATHOMABLE BEING THROUGH WHOSE INSTRUMENTALITY AN AWFUL MYSTERY WAS SOLVED.

THE manner in which I became intimately associated with a fearful mystery with which not only all London but all England was ringing, and the strange, inexplicable Being whom the course of events brought to my knowledge, are so startling and wonderful, that I have grown to believe that by no effort of the imagination, however wild and bewildering the labyrinths into which it may lead a man, can the actual realism of our everyday life be outrivaled. What I am about to narrate is absolutely true—somewhat of an unnecessary statement, for the reason that human fancy could never have invented it. To a person unfamiliar with the wondrous life of a great city like London the story may appear impossible, but there are thousands of men and women who will immediately recognise in its features with which they became acquainted through the columns of the newspapers. I venture to say that the leading incident by which one morning—it was but yesterday—the great city was thrilled and horrified can never be entirely effaced from their memories. Dark crimes and

deeds of heroism, in which the incidents are pathetic or pitiful, draw even strangers into sympathetic relation with each other. These events come home to us, as it were. What happened to one whose face we have never seen, whose hand we have never grasped, may happen to us who move in the same familiar grooves of humanity. Our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, our duties and temptations, are the same, because we are human; and it is this common tie of kinship that will cause the story of Devlin the Barber to be received with more than ordinary interest. Now, for the first time is revealed, in these pages, the strange manner in which the fearful mystery in which it was enshrouded was unravelled. The facts are as I shall relate them, and whatever the impression they may create, a shuddering curiosity must inevitably be aroused as to the nature and movements of the inscrutable Being through whose instrumentality I was made the agent in revealing what would otherwise have remained for ever hidden from human knowledge. By a few incredulous persons—I refer to those to whom nothing spiritual is demonstrable—the existence of this Being may be doubted; but none the less does he live and move among us this very day, pursuing his mission with a purpose and to an end which it is not in the power of mortal insight to fathom. It is not unlikely that some of my readers may have come unconsciously in contact with him within the last few hours.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH AN ACCOUNT IS GIVEN OF THE GOOD FORTUNE WHICH BEFELL MR. MELLADEW.

I AM a struggling man—the phrase will be well understood, for the class to which I belong is a large one—and I reside in a neighbourhood which is neither very poor nor

very fashionable. I have, of course, my friends and acquaintances, and among the most intimate of the former is a family of the name of Melladew.

Mr. Melladew is a reader in a printing-office in which a weekly newspaper is printed. Mrs. Melladew, with the assistance of one small servant, manages the home. They had two daughters, twins, eighteen years of age, named respectively Mary and Elizabeth. These girls were very beautiful, and were so much alike that they were frequently mistaken for one another. Mrs. Melladew has told me that when they were very young she was compelled to make some distinguishing mark in their dress to avoid confusion in her recognition of them, such as differently coloured socks or pieces of ribbon. The home of the Melladews was a happy one, and the sisters loved each other sincerely. They were both in outdoor employment, in the establishments of a general linendraper and a fashionable dressmaker. Mary was in the employment of the linendraper—Limbird's, in Regent Street. It is a firm of wide repute, and employs a great number of hands, some of whom sleep in the house. This was the case with Mary Melladew, who went to her work on Monday morning and did not return home until Saturday night. Elizabeth, or Lizzie as she was always called, was employed by Madame Michel, in Baker Street. She went to her work at half-past eight every morning and returned home at half-past seven every night.

The printing-office in which Mr. Melladew is engaged employs two readers, a night reader and a day reader. Mr. Melladew is the day reader, his hours being from nine in the morning till seven in the evening. But on Saturdays he has a much longer spell; he is due in the office at eight in the morning, and he remains until two or three hours past midnight—a stretch of eighteen or nineteen hours. By that time all the work for the Sunday edition of the weekly newspaper is done, and the outside pages are being worked off on the steam presses.

Now, upon the Saturday morning on which, so far as I

am concerned, the entralling interest of my story commences, certain important events had occurred in my career and in that of Mr. Melladew. Exactly one month previous to that day, the firm in which I had been employed for a great many years had given me a month's notice to leave. My dismissal was not caused by any lapse of duty on my part; it was simply that business had been for some time in a bad state, and that my employers found it necessary to reduce their staff. Among those who received notice to quit, I, unfortunately, was included. Therefore, when I rose on Saturday morning I was in the dismal position of a man out of work, my time having expired on the day before. This was of serious importance to me. With Mr. Melladew the case was different. In what unexpectedly occurred to him there was bright sunshine, to be succeeded by black darkness.

He had visited me on the Friday night, and I perceived at once that he was in a state of intense and pleasurable excitement.

"I have come to tell you some good news," he said.

For a moment I thought that this good news might affect myself, and might bring about a favourable turn in my affairs, but Mr. Melladew's next words dispelled the hope.

"I am the happiest man in London," he said.

I reflected gravely, but not enviously, upon my own position, and waited for Mr. Melladew to explain himself.

"Did I ever mention to you," he asked, "that I had a brother-in-law in Australia?"

"Yes," I replied, "you have spoken of him lately two or three times."

"So many years had passed," said Mr. Melladew, "since my wife heard from him that I had almost forgotten him. He is her brother, you know, and his name is Portland—Richard Portland. That was my wife's name before we were married—not Richard, of course, but Portland." He laughed, and rubbed his leg with

his right hand ; in his left hand was a letter. " It was about eight months ago that we received a letter from him, asking us to give him information about our family and circumstances. He did not say anything about his own, so we were left quite in the dark as to whether he was rich or poor, or a married man or a bachelor. However, my wife answered his letter, and sent him the pictures of our two girls, and in her letter she asked whether he was married and had a family, and said also that she would like him to send us their pictures. Well, we heard nothing further from him till to-day. Another letter came from him while I was at the office. You may read it ; there is nothing private in it. It isn't from Australia ; it is written from Southampton, you see. But that is not the only surprise in it."

I took the letter and read it. It was, indeed, a letter to give pleasurable surprise to the receiver. Without any announcement to Mr. Melladew of his intention, Mr. Portland had left Australia, and was now in Southampton. He intended to start by an early train on Saturday morning for London, and would come straight to his brother-in-law's house. In the letter he replied to the questions put by Mrs. Melladew. He was a bachelor, without family ties of any kind in Australia. Moreover, he had made his fortune, and it was the portraits of his two nieces which were the main cause of his return to England. Their beauty had evidently made a deep impression upon him. He spoke of them and of Mrs. Melladew in the most affectionate terms, and said it was a great pleasure to him to think that he was coming to a home which he hoped he might look upon as partly his own. He sent his warmest love to them all, and in pleasantly tender words, the meaning of which could scarcely be mistaken, he desired a message to be given to his " dear nieces," to the effect that " their ship had come home." I handed the letter back to Mr. Melladew, and expressed my gratification at the good news.

"It is good news," he said gleefully, "the best of news. I knew you would be pleased. I am wondering whether it is a large or a small fortune he has made. My wife says a large one."

"And I say a large one," I remarked.

"What makes you of that opinion?" inquired Mr. Melladew.

"Well, in the first place there are so many large fortunes made in Australia."

"That is true."

"Then, money being so much more plentiful there than here, a man gets to think less of a little than we do. His ideas become larger, I mean. At any time these last dozen years a hundred pounds would have been a God-send to me, and I should have thought of it so——"

"So would I," interposed Mr. Melladew.

"But if you and I were in a land of gold, we should, I daresay, think much more lightly of a hundred pounds. I wish I had emigrated when I was first married; I had the chance, and let it slip. But it's no use crying over spilt milk."

"Not a bit of use," said Mr. Melladew; "life's a perpetual grind here, and I am truly grateful for the light this letter has let in upon us. You've given me two reasons for thinking my brother-in-law's fortune a large one. Have you any others?"

"Well, he speaks of your daughters' ship having come home. That looks as if he meant to provide for them."

"It does look like it," said Mr. Melladew; and I saw that my arguments had given him pleasure. "My wife has a reason, also, for thinking so. She says, when Dick—that is her brother, you know—went away he declared he would never come back to England unless he could come back a very rich man. 'And,' says my wife, 'what Dick said, he'd stick to.' She is sure of that. It's wonderful, isn't it? He didn't have a sovereign to bless himself with

when he left England, and now—but it's no use speculating. We shall know everything soon. You will understand my feelings ; you have children of your own."

I had indeed, and it made me rueful to think of them. Getting another situation in such hard times was no easy matter.

"It isn't for myself," resumed Mr. Melladew, "that I am overjoyed at the better prospect before us : it is for my girls. Perhaps it means that they will not have to go out to work any longer. They are good girls, but they are so pretty, and have such engaging ways, that I have often been disturbed by the circumstance of their not being so much under my own and their mother's eyes as we would wish them to be. It could not be helped hitherto. There's the question of dress, now. You can manage tolerably well when they're little girls ; a clever woman like my wife can turn and twist, and cut up old things in a way to make the little ones look quite nice ; but when they become young women, with all sorts of new ideas in their pretty heads, it is another pair of shoes. It's natural, too, that they should want a little pocket money to spend upon innocent pleasures and harmless vanities. We were young ourselves once, weren't we ? We found we couldn't afford to give the girls what they wanted. They saw it, too, so they made up their minds, without saying a word to us, to look out for situations for themselves, and for months they haven't been a farthing's expense to us. They even give their mother a trifle a week towards the home. Good girls, the best of girls ; I should be a miserable man without them. Still, as I said, I have been uneasy about them : there are so many scoundrels in the world ready with honeyed words to turn a girl's head ; and it hurts me to think that they have their little secrets which they don't ask us to share. Now, thank God, it will be all right. My brother-in-law will be here to-morrow, and when he sees Lizzie and Mary he will be confirmed in his kind intentions towards them. They can leave their situations ; and if any man wishes to pay

them attentions he can do so in a straightforward manner in the home in which they were brought up."

He was in the blithest of spirits, and I cordially renewed my congratulations on his good fortune. In return, he condoled with me on the unpromising change in my own prospects. I was not very cheerful—no man could be in such a position—but I am not in the habit of magnifying my misfortunes to my friends, and I plucked up my spirits.

"You will soon get another situation," said Mr. Melladew.

"I hope so," I replied; "I cannot afford to keep long out of one."

"It may be in my power to give you a lift," he said kindly. "Who knows what may turn up in the course of the next few hours?"

I attached no signification to this not uncommon remark at the time it was uttered, but it recurred to me afterwards, charged with sad and terrible import. We fell to again discussing the matter of which he was full.

"I am almost ashamed of my good luck," said Mr. Melladew, "when I think what has happened to you."

"A man must accept the ups and downs of life with courage," I said, "and must put the best face he can upon them."

We were true friends, and I had a sincere respect for him as a worthy fellow who had faithfully performed his duties to his family and employers. He was passionately fond of his two daughters, and frequently spoke of them as the greatest blessing in his life. It was, indeed, delightful to witness the affection he bestowed upon them in the happy home of which he was the head. They were girls of which any man might have been proud, being not only beautiful, but bright and witty, and full of animation.

Mr. Melladew and I chatted together for another half-hour, and then he wished me good-night.

"It is fortunate," he said, "that I got away from the

office an hour earlier than usual. I shall be at home when Lizzie returns from her work, and I want to be the first to tell her the good news. How excited she will be ! There was a friend at the house last night, who told us our fortunes. Lizzie is very fond of having her fortune told. 'There, father,' she says, 'didn't my fortune say that I was to receive a letter ? And I've got one.' As if there was anything out of the way in receiving a letter ! Last night she was told that a great and wonderful surprise was in store for her. Well, there is, but I am certain the fortune-teller knew as much about its nature as the man in the moon."

"And Mary?" I said. "Will you tell her to-night?"

"No," replied Mr. Melladew, "we will wait till she comes home to-morrow. When she sees her uncle from Australia sitting in my arm-chair, she won't know what to think of it. Happy girls, happy girls!"

"And happy father and mother, too," I said.

"Yes, yes," he said, with great feeling, "and happy father and mother too."

It was in no envious spirit that I contrasted his good luck with my bad, but had I suspected what the next few hours had in store for him, I should have thanked God for my lot. We have reason to be profoundly grateful for the ills we escape.

CHAPTER II.

I AM THE RECIPIENT OF TERRIBLE NEWS.

ON Saturday morning I rose early, with the strange feelings of a man whose habits of life had been suddenly and violently wrenched out of their usual course. I wandered up and down the stairs and into all the rooms in the house, and to the street-door, where I stood looking vacantly along the street, perhaps for the situation I had lost, as

though it were something I had dropped by accident and could pick up again. Two or three neighbours passed and gave me good-morning, and one paused and asked if I was not well.

"Not well?" I echoed, somewhat irritably; "I am well, quite well. What makes you think otherwise?"

"O," he answered apologetically, "only seeing you here, that's all. It's so unusual."

He passed on, looking once or twice behind him. Unusual? Of course it was unusual. Everything was unusual, everything in the world, which seemed to be turned topsy-turvy. If the people in the street had walked on their heads instead of their feet it would not have surprised me very much. I should have regarded it as quite in keeping with the fact that I was standing at my own street-door in idleness at half-past eight o'clock on a Saturday morning; I could not remember the time when such a thing had occurred to me.

Standing thus in a state of semi-stupefaction, the postman came up and gave me a letter. This recalled me to myself.

"Now," thought I, as I turned the envelope over in my hand, "whom is it from, and what does it contain?"

At first I had an unreasonable hope that it was from my employers, imploring me to come back, but a glance at the address convinced me that it was a foolish hope. The writing was strange to me, and the envelope was a common one, and was fastened with sealing-wax bearing the impression of a thimble. I opened and read the letter, and although it did not contain the offer of a situation, or hold out the prospect of one, the contents interested me. I shall have occasion presently to refer to this letter more particularly, and shall at present content myself with saying that had it not arrived this story would never have been written. While my wife and I were at breakfast we spoke of it, and I said it was my intention to comply with the request it contained.

Over breakfast, also, we reviewed our position. During my years of employment I had managed to save very little money, and upon reckoning up what I had in my purse and what I owed, I arrived at a balance in my favour of a little less than four pounds, which represented the whole of my worldly wealth. A poor look-out, and I was reflecting upon it gloomily, when my good little wife, with a tender deprecatory smile, laid before me on the table a Post Office savings-book.

"What is this?" I asked.

"Look," she replied.

The book was made out in her name, and the small deposits, extending over a number of years, made therein showed a credit of more than twenty pounds.

"Yours?" I said, in wonder. "Really yours?"

"No," said my wife. "Yours."

My heart beat with joy; these twenty pounds were like a reprieve. I should have time to look about, without being tortured by fears of immediate want. I drew my wife to my side, and embraced her. Twenty pounds, with which to commence over again the battle of life! Why it was a fortune! How the little woman had contrived to save so much out of her scanty housekeeping money was a mystery to me, but she had done it by hook or by crook, as the saying is, and she now experienced a true and sweet delight in handing it over to me.

"Well," said I, rubbing my hands cheerfully, "things might look worse than they do—a great deal worse. We have a little store to help us over compulsorily idle days, and, thank God, all the children are well."

It was much to be grateful for, and we kissed each other in token of our gratitude, and also as a pledge that we would not lose heart, but would battle bravely on.

I had just finished my second cup of tea when the street-door was hastily opened, and my friend Mr. Melladew staggered, or rather fell, into the room, with a face as white as a ghost. His limbs were trembling so that he could

not stand, and my wife, much alarmed, started up and helped him into a chair.

On this special morning we had breakfasted late, and as my wife was assisting Mr. Melladew the clock struck ten.

It sometimes happens that the most ordinary occurrences become of unusual importance by reason of circumstances with which they have no connection. Thus it was that the striking of ten o'clock, as I gazed upon the white face of my visitor, filled me with an apprehension of impending evil.

"Good God!" I cried. "What has happened?"

My thought was that there had been an accident to the train by which Mr. Melladew expected his brother-in-law from Southampton, but I was soon undeceived. It was difficult to extract anything intelligible from Mr. Melladew in his terrible state of agitation; but eventually I was placed in possession of the following particulars.

Mr. Melladew had risen early and had left his wife abed, and, as he supposed, his daughter Lizzie. It was Mrs. Melladew's custom on Saturday mornings to take half-an-hour extra in the way of sleep, and Mr. Melladew would prepare his own breakfast on these occasions. He did so on this morning, and left his house at twenty minutes to eight. At eight o'clock punctually he was sitting at his desk in the printing-office, reading proofs. Everything was going on as usual, the only pleasant difference being the extraordinary lightness of Mr. Melladew's heart as he thought of his rich brother-in-law from Australia, perhaps at that very hour stepping into the train for London, and of his two darling children, Lizzie and Mary. He did not, however, allow this contemplation to interfere with the faithful and steady discharge of his duties, and his work proceeded uninterruptedly until half-past nine, when he sent his young assistant, a reading boy, into the composing-room with the last proofs he had read, telling him to bring back any more that were ready. A workman at the galley-press had just pulled off a column of newly set-up matter,

and the lad, without waiting for it to be delivered to him, took the slip from the printer's hand, and returned quickly to the reading-room. Mr. Melladew, receiving the slip from his assistant, was about to commence arranging the "copy," which the lad had also brought with him, when a compositor rushed in, and, snatching both slip and "copy" from Mr. Melladew's desk, hurriedly left the room.

"What's that for?" inquired Mr. Melladew.

"I don't know, sir," replied the lad; "but there's something 'up' in the composing-room. The men are all standing talking in a regular fluster."

"What about?"

"Ain't got a notion, sir; but they seem regular upset."

Curious to ascertain what was going on, Mr. Melladew strolled into the composing-room, and was struck by the sudden silence which ensued upon his entrance. It was all the more singular because Mr. Melladew, as he pushed the door open, heard the men speaking in excited voices, and had half a fancy that he heard his own name uttered in tones of pity. "Poor Melladew!" Yes, it was not a fancy. The words had been uttered at the moment of his entrance. The silence of the compositors, their pitying looks, confirmed it. But why should they speak of him as "poor Melladew" at a time when life had never been so bright and fair? What was the meaning of the pitying glances directed towards him? The composing - room, especially on Saturdays, was a scene of lively bustle and animation, but now the men were standing idle, stick in hand, at the corners of their frames, or tip-toeing over their cases, and the eyes of every man there were fixed upon Mr. Melladew. Had he been in trouble, had his wife or one of his darling daughters been ill, his thoughts would have immediately flown to his home, and he would have seen in the pitying glances of the compositors a sign of some dread misfortune; but in his happy mood he received no such impression.

"What on earth is the matter with you all?" he said in a light tone.

He saw the compositor who had snatched the slip of new matter from his desk, and before he could be prevented he took it from the man's hand.

The compositors found their voices.

"No, Mr. Melladew!" they cried. "No; don't, don't!"

"Nonsense!" he said, and keeping possession of the slip, he left the composing-room for his own.

"Go and get the copy," he said to the lad who had followed him.

When the lad was gone he spread the slip on the desk before him. The first words he saw formed the title of the column he was about to read: "Horrible Murder in Victoria Park!" Beneath it were the sub-headings, "Stabbed to the Heart!" and "A Bunch of Blood-stained Daisies!" To a newspaper reader such events, shocking though they be, are unhappily no novelties, and Mr. Melladew looked down the column, I will not say mechanically, for he was a humane man, but steadily, and stirred no doubt by pity and indignation. But before he had got half-way down the pulsations of his heart seemed to stop, and the words swam before his eyes. His eyes lighted on the name of the girl who had been murdered.

It was that of his own daughter, Lizzie Melladew!

CHAPTER III.

A SHOAL OF VISITORS—FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER MYSTERY.

In an agony of horror and despair he had flown from the printing-office to my house.

I cannot say whether he chose my house premeditatedly; it is likely that it was done without distinct intention, but it was a proof that he regarded my friendship as genuine,

and that he knew he could depend upon my sympathy in times of trouble. As indeed he could. My heart bled as I gazed upon him. The words issued with difficulty from his trembling lips ; his features were convulsed ; he shook like a man in an ague.

"O, my Lizzie!" he moaned. "My poor, poor Lizzie ! O, my child, my child !"

I took in regularly a penny daily newspaper, and I had read it on this morning, but there was no mention in its columns of the dreadful occurrence. The discovery had been made too late for the first editions of the daily journals.

Mr. Melladew's story being told, disjointedly, and in fragments which I had to piece together in order to arrive at an intelligible comprehension of it, the unhappy man sat before me, moaning.

"O, my Lizzie ! O, my poor child !"

"Was she at home ?" I asked gently ; I did not attempt to console him. Of what avail were mere words at such a moment ? "Was she at home when you went from here last night ?"

"Yes, she was there," he moaned. "When she went to bed I kissed her. For the last time ! For the last, last time !"

And then he broke down utterly. I could get nothing further from him.

When she went to bed, he kissed her. What kind of riddle was here, in the midst of the horrible tragedy, that the hapless girl should have wished her parents good-night and retired to rest, and be found ruthlessly murdered a few hours afterwards in an open park at some distance from her house ? With such joyful news as Mr. Melladew had to communicate to his daughter, the probability was that they had kept up later than usual, talking of the brighter future that then seemed spread before them. It made the tragic riddle all the more difficult.

There came a knock at the street-door, and a gentleman was admitted, upon most urgent business he said. It turned

out that he was a newspaper reporter, who, in advance of the police, had tracked Mr. Melladew to my house, and had come to obtain information from him for his newspaper. I pointed out to him the condition of Mr. Melladew, and said something to the effect that it was scarcely decent to intrude upon him at such a time.

The reporter, who evidently felt deeply for the bereaved father, and whose considerate manner was such as to completely disarm me, said aside to me,

"Pray do not think that I am devoid of feeling; I am a father myself, and have a daughter of the age of his poor girl. My mission is not one of idle curiosity. A ruthless murder has been committed, and the murderer is at large. I am not working only for my paper; I am assisting the cause of justice. Every scrap of information we can obtain will hasten the arrest of the wretch who has been guilty of a crime so diabolical."

"He can tell you nothing," I said, compelled to admit that he was right. "Look at him as he sits there, crushed and broken down by the blow."

"I pity him from my heart," said the reporter. "Can you assist me in any way? Did the poor girl live at home?"

"She lived at home certainly, but she had employment at Madame Michel's, in Baker Street."

"Madame Michel's, in Baker Street. I must go there. Did she sleep out?"

"No; she came home every night at half-past seven."

"Did she do so last night?"

"Yes."

"Did she not go to some place of amusement?"

"Not to my knowledge. Her father told me that before she went to bed he kissed her good-night."

"Do you know at what hour?"

"I do not."

"But presumably not early."

"Not so early as usual, I should say, because her father had some good news to communicate to her, and they

would stop up late talking of it. Understand, much of what I say is presumptive."

"But reasonable," said the reporter. "Did the poor girl have a sweetheart?"

Words which Mr. Melladew had spoken on the previous night recurred to me here. "There are so many scoundrels in the world ready with honeyed words to turn a girl's head; and it hurts me to think that they have their little secrets which they don't ask us to share." Did not this point to a secret which was hidden from her parents? I said nothing of this to the reporter, but answered that I was not aware that the poor girl had a sweetheart.

"Some one must have been in love with her," said the reporter.

"Many, perhaps," I rejoined; "but not one courted her openly, I believe—that is, to her parents' knowledge."

"That counts for very little. She was a beautiful girl."

"How?" I exclaimed. "Have you seen her?"

"I saw her this morning," he answered gravely, "within the last two hours. She looked like an angel."

"Was there no trace of suffering in her face?" I asked wistfully.

"None. She was stabbed to the heart—only one, sharp, swift, devilish blow, and death must have been instantaneous. To my unprofessional eye it almost seems as if she must have died in sleep—in happy sleep."

"That, at least, is merciful. Hush!"

Mr. Melladew was rocking to and fro murmuring, "O, my Lizzie, my darling child! O, my poor, poor Lizzie!" We had spoken in low tones, and he evinced no consciousness of having heard what we said. During our conversation the reporter was jotting down notes unobtrusively. The conversation would doubtless have been continued had it not been for the appearance of other persons, following rapidly upon each other, policemen, and additional reporters, who had discovered that Mr. Melladew was in my house.

The last to appear was Mrs. Melladew, who had heard rumours of the frightful crime, and who flew round to me, not knowing that her husband was in the room. What passed from that moment, while all these persons were buzzing around me, was so confusing that I cannot hope to give an intelligible transcript of it. I was, as it were, in the background, as one who had no immediate interest in the unravelling of the terrible mystery. It was a most agitating time to me and my wife, and when my visitors had all departed I felt like a man who had been afflicted by a horrible nightmare. How little did I imagine that the letter I had received by the early morning's post, and which I had in my pocket, was vitally connected with it, and that of all those present I was the man who was destined to bring the mystery to light !

Before the day was over fresh surprises were in store for me in connection with the dreadful deed. Needless to say that the whole neighbourhood was in a state of great excitement ; so numerous were my idle visitors that I was compelled to tell my wife to admit into the house no person but the Melladews, or relatives of theirs. In the afternoon, however, one visitor called who would not be denied. He sent in his card, which bore the name of George Carton, and I said I would see him.

He was a young man, whose age I judged to be between twenty and twenty-five, well dressed, and remarkably good-looking. His manners were those of one who was accustomed to move in good society, and both his speech and behaviour during the interview impressed me favourably. I observed when he entered the room that he was greatly agitated.

"I have intruded myself upon you, sir," he said, "because I felt that I should go mad if I did not speak to some person who was a friend of—or——"

He could not proceed, and I finished the sentence for him. "Of the poor girl who has been so cruelly murdered?"

He nodded his head, and, when he could control his voice, said, "You were an intimate friend of hers, sir?"

"Mr. Melladew's family and mine," I replied, "have been on terms of friendship for many years. I have known the poor girl and her sister since their infancy."

"I did not dare to call upon Mr. Melladew," he said, and then he faltered again and paused.

"Are you acquainted with him?" I asked.

"No," he said, "but I hoped to be. If I went now and told him what I wish to impart to you, he might look upon me as responsible for what has occurred." He put his hand over his eyes, from which the tears were flowing.

"What is it you wish to impart to me?" I inquired, "and why should you suppose you would be held responsible for so horrible a crime?"

"I scarcely know what I am saying," he replied. "But my secret intimacy with Lizzie"—I caught my breath at his familiar utterance of the name—"becoming known to him now for the first time, might put wrong ideas into his head."

"Your secret intimacy with Lizzie?" I exclaimed.

"We have known each other for more than four months," he said.

"Secretly?"

"Yes, secretly."

"And the poor girl's parents were not aware of it?"

"They were not. It was partly my poor Lizzie's wish, and partly my own, I think, until I was sure that I possessed her love. She kept it from me for a long time. 'Wait,' she used to say, smiling—'pardon me, sir; my heart seems as if it would break when I speak of her—'Wait,' she used to say, 'I am not certain yet whether I really, really love you.' But she did, sir, all along."

"How do you know that?" I asked, in doubt now whether I should regard him with favour or suspicion.

"She confessed it to me last Tuesday night as she walked home from Baker Street."

" You were in the habit of meeting her, then ? "

" Yes. I beg you to believe, sir, there was nothing wrong in it. I loved and honoured her sincerely. I wanted then to accompany her home and ask her parents' permission to pay my addresses to her openly : but she said no, and that she would speak to them first herself. It was arranged so. She was to tell them to-night, and I was to call and see her father and mother to-morrow. And now —and now—" Again he paused, overpowered by grief. Presently he spoke again. " See here, sir."

He detached a locket from his chain, and opening it, showed me the sweet and beautiful face of Lizzie Melladew.

" It was taken for me," he said, " on Wednesday morning. She obtained permission from her employers for an hour's absence, and we went together to get it taken. The photographer hurried the picture on for me, I was so anxious for it. I had my picture taken for her, and put into a locket, which I was to give her to-morrow with this ring in the presence of her parents." He produced both the locket and the ring. The locket was a handsome gold ornament, set with pearls ; the ring was a half-hoop, set with diamonds. The gifts were such as only a man in a good position could afford to give. " I shall never be happy again," he said mournfully, as he replaced the locket on his chain, after gazing on the beautiful face with eyes of pitiful love.

" Were you in the habit of writing to her ? " I asked.

" No, sir. No letters passed between us ; there was no need to write, I saw her so often—four or five times a week. ' When father and mother know everything,' she said on Tuesday night, ' you shall write to me every day.' I promised that I would."

" I am not sorry you confided in me," I said, completely won over by the young man's ingenuousness and undoubted sincerity ; " but I can offer you no words of comfort. You will have to make this known to others."

"I shall do what is right, sir. It is not in your power, nor in any man's, to give me any comfort or consolation. The happiness of my life is destroyed—but there is still one thing left me, and I will not rest till it is accomplished. As God is my judge, I will not!" He did not give me time to ask his meaning, but continued: "You can do me the greatest favour, sir."

"What is it?"

"I must see Mary—her sister, sir. Can you send round to the house, and ask her to come and see me here? She *will* come when she gets my message. Will you do this for me, sir?"

"Yes," I replied, "there is no harm in it."

I called my wife, and bade her go to Mr. Melladew's house, and contrive to see Mary Melladew privately, and give her the young man's message. During my wife's absence George Carton and I exchanged but few words. He sat for the chief part of the time with his head resting on his hand, and I was busy thinking whether the information he had imparted to me would be likely to afford a clue to the discovery of the murderer. My wife returned with consternation depicted on her face.

"Mary is not at home," she said.

"Where has she gone?" cried George Carton, starting up.

To my astonishment my wife replied, "They are in the greatest trouble about her. She has not been home all the day."

"Have they not seen anything of her?" I asked, also rising to my feet.

"No," said my wife, "they have seen nothing whatever of her."

"Is it possible," I exclaimed, "that she can be still at her place of business, in ignorance of what has taken place?"

"No," cried George Carton, in great excitement, "she is not there. I have been to inquire. She went out

last night, and never returned. Great God ! What can be the meaning of it ?"

I strove in vain to calm him. He paced the room with flashing eyes, muttering to himself words so wild that I could not arrive at the least understanding of them.

"Gone ! Gone !" he cried at last. "But where, where ? I will not sleep, I will not rest, till I find her ! Neither will I rest till I discover the murderer of my darling girl ! And when I discover him, when he stands before me, as there is a living God, I will kill him with my own hands !"

His passion was so intense that I feared he would there and then commit some act of violence, and I made an endeavour to restrain and calm him by throwing my arms around him ; but he broke from me with a torrent of frantic words, and rushed out of the house.

Here was another mystery, added to the tragedy of the last few hours. What was to be the outcome of it ? From what quarter was light to come ?

CHAPTER IV.

MR. RICHARD PORTLAND MAKES A SINGULAR PROPOSITION TO ME.

IN the evening I received another visitor, in the person of Mr. Richard Portland, Mr. Melladew's brother-in-law. A shrewd, hard-headed man, but much cast down at present. It was clear to me, after a little conversation with him, that his nieces, Mary and the hapless Lizzie, had been the great inducement of his coming home to England, and I learnt from him that there was no doubt about the news of Mary Melladew's mysterious disappearance.

Mr. Portland was a thoroughly practical man, even in matters of sentiment. It was sentiment truly that had

brought him home, but his expectations had been blasted by the news of the tragedy which had greeted him on his arrival. He was deeply moved by the affliction which had fallen upon his sister's family; his indignation was aroused against the monster who had brought this fearful blow upon them; and, in addition, he was bitterly angry at being deprived of the society of two lovely, interesting girls, in whose hearts he had naturally hoped to find a place.

"My brother is fit for nothing," he said. "He is prostrate, and cannot be roused to action. He moans and moans, and clasps his head. My sister is no better; she goes out of one fainting fit into another."

"What can they do?" I asked. "What would you have them do?"

"Not sit idly down," he replied curtly. "That is not the way to discover the murderer; and discovered he must and shall be, if it costs me my fortune."

"There have been murders," I remarked, "in the very heart of London, and though years have passed, the murderers still walk the streets undetected."

"It is incredible," he said.

"It is true," was my rejoinder.

"But surely," he urged, "this will not be classed among them?"

"I trust not."

"Money will do much."

"Much, but not everything. You have been many years in Australia. Have not such crimes been committed even there without the perpetrators being brought to justice?"

"Yes," he replied, "but Australia and London are not to be spoken of in the same breath. There, a man may succeed in making himself lost in wild and vast tracts of country. He can walk for days without meeting a living soul. Here he is surrounded by his fellow-creatures."

"Your argument," I said, "tells against yourself. Here, in the crush and turmoil of millions, each atom with

its own individual and overwhelming cares and anxieties, the murderer is comparatively safe. No one notices him. Why should they, in such a seething crowd? In the bush he is the central figure; he walks along with a hang-dog look; he *must* halt at certain places for food, and his guilty manner draws attention upon him. In that lies his danger. But this is profitless argument. For my part, I see no reason why the murderer of your unfortunate niece should not be discovered."

"Sensibly said. It must be a man who committed the deed."

"That has to be proved," I remarked.

"Surely you don't believe it was a woman?" exclaimed Mr. Portland.

"Such things have been. In these cases of mystery it is always an error to rush at a conclusion and to set to work upon it, to the exclusion of all others. It is as great an error to reject a theory because of its improbability. My dear sir, nothing is improbable in this city of ours; I am almost tempted to say that nothing is impossible. The columns of our newspapers teem with romance which once upon a time would have been regarded as fables."

Mr. Portland looked at me thoughtfully as he said, "You are doubtless right. It needs such a mind as yours to bring the matter to light—a mind both comprehensive and microscopic. There is some satisfaction in speaking to you; a man hears things worth listening to. The unpractical stuff that has been buzzing in my ears ever since I arrived from Southampton has almost driven me crazy. Give me your careful attention for a few moments; it may be something in your pocket."

He paused awhile, as though considering a point, before he resumed.

"My coming home to the old country has been a bitter disappointment to me. Quite apart from the sympathy I feel for the parents upon whom such a dreadful blow has fallen, the news which greeted me on my arrival has upset

the plans I had formed. Over there"—with a jerk of his thumb over his right shoulder, as though Australia lay immediately in the rear of his chair—"where I made a pretty considerable fortune, I had no family ties, and was often chewing the cud of loneliness, lamenting that I had no one to care for, and no one to care for me. When I received the portraits of my nieces I was captivated by them, and I thought of them continually. Here was the very thing I was sighing for, a human tie to banish the devil of loneliness from my heart. The beautiful young girls belonged to me in a measure, and would welcome and love me. I should have a home to go to where I should be greeted with affection. I won't dwell upon what I thought, because I hate a man who spins a thing out threadbare, but you will understand it. I came home to enjoy the society of my two beautiful nieces, and I find what you know of. Well, one poor girl has gone, and cannot be recalled; but the other, Mary, so far as we know, is alive; and yet she, too, disappeared last night, and nothing has been heard of her. She must be found; if she is in danger she must be rescued; she must be restored to her parents' arms, and to mine. Something else. The murderer of my poor niece Lizzie must be discovered and brought to justice—must be, I say! There shall be no miscarriage here; the villain shall not escape. Now, you—excuse me if I speak abruptly, I mean no disrespect by it; it is only my way of speaking; and I don't wish to be rude or to pry into your private affairs, far from it. What I mean is, money?"

I stared at him in amazement; he had stated his meaning in one pregnant word, but he had failed in conveying to my mind any comprehension of it.

"Now, I put it to you," he said, "and I hope you'll take it kindly. I give you my word that my intentions are good. You are not a rich man, are you?"

"No," I answered promptly; for he was so frank and open, and was speaking in a tone of such deep concern, that

I could not take offence at a question which at other times I should have resented. "I am not."

"And you wouldn't turn your nose up at a thousand pounds?"

"No, indeed I would not," I said heartily, wondering what on earth the rich Australian was driving at.

"Well, then," he said, touching my breast with his forefinger, "you discover the murderer of my poor niece Lizzie, and the thousand pounds are yours. I will give the money to you. Something else: find my niece Mary, and restore her to her parents and to me, and I'll make it two thousand. Come, you don't have such a chance every day."

"That is true," I said, and I could not help liking the old fellow for this display of heart. "But it is too remote for consideration."

"Not at all, my dear sir, not at all," and again he touched my breast with his forefinger; "there is nothing remote in it."

"But why," I asked, not at all convinced by his insistence, "do you offer *me* such a reward, instead of going to the police?"

"Partly because of what you said, confirmed—though I didn't think of it at the time you mentioned it—by what I have read, about murders being committed in the very heart of London, without the murderers ever being discovered."

"I was simply stating a fact."

"Exactly; and it speaks well for the police, doesn't it? But I have only explained part of my reason for offering you the reward. It isn't alone what you said about undiscovered murderers, it is because you spoke like a sensible man, who, once having his finger on a clue, wouldn't let it slip till he'd worked it right out; and like a man who, while he was working that clue, wouldn't let others slip that might happen to come in his way. I've opened my mind to you, and I've nothing more to say until

you come to me to say something on your own account. O, yes I have, though; I was forgetting that we're strangers to one another, and that it wouldn't be reasonable for me to expect you to take my word for a thousand pounds. Well, then, to show you that I am in earnest, I lay on the table Bank of England notes for a hundred pounds. Here they are, on account."

To my astonishment he had pulled out his pocket-book and extracted ten ten-pound notes, and there they lay on the table before me. I would have entreated him to take them back, feeling that it would be the falsest of false pretences to accept them, but before I could speak again he was gone.

I called my wife into the room, and told her what had passed. She regarded it in the same light as myself, but I noted a little wistful look in her eyes as she glanced at the bank-notes.

"A thousand pounds!" she sighed, half-longingly, half-humorously. "If we could only call it ours! Why, it would make our fortune!"

"It would, my dear," I said, wishing in my heart of hearts that I had a thousand pounds of my own to throw into her lap. "But this particular thousand pounds which the good old fellow has so generously offered will never come into our possession. So let us dismiss it from our minds."

"Mr. Portland," said my wife, "evidently thinks you would make a good detective."

"That may or may not be, though his opinion of me is altogether too flattering. Certainly, if I had a clue to the discovery of this terrible mystery—"

"You would follow it up," said my wife, finishing the sentence for me.

"Undoubtedly I would, with courage and determination. With such a reward in view, nothing should shake me off. I would prove myself a very bloodhound. But there," I said, half ashamed at being led away, "I am

sailing in the clouds. Let's talk no more about it. As for Mr. Portland's hundred pounds I will put the notes carefully by, and return them to him at the first opportunity. Poor Mrs. Melladew! How I pity her and Melladew! I shall never forget the picture of the father sitting in that chair, moaning, 'My poor, poor Lizzie! O, my child, my child!' It was heartbreaking."

My wife and I talked a great deal of it during the night, and before we went to bed I had purchased at least seven or eight newspapers of the newsboys who passed through the street crying out new editions and latest news of the dreadful deed. But there was nothing really new. Matters were in the same state as when the body of the hapless girl was found in Victoria Park early in the morning. I recognised how dangerous was the delay. Every additional hour increased the chances of the murderer's escape from the hands of justice.

I did not sleep well; my slumbers were disturbed by fantastic, horrible dreams. It was eleven o'clock on Sunday morning before I quitted my bed.

CHAPTER V.

I PAY A VISIT TO MRS. LEMON.

I MUST now speak of the letter which I received on the morning of the murder, as I stood at my street-door. It was from a Mrs. Lemon, entreating me to call upon her at any hour most convenient to me on this Sunday, and it was couched in terms so imploring that it would have been cruel on my part to refuse, more especially as the writer had some slight claim upon me. Mrs. Lemon had been for many years a nurse and servant in my parents' house, and the children were fond of her. She was then a spinster, and her name was Fanny Peel. We used to make jokes

upon it, and call her Fancy Peel, Orange Peel, Candied Peel, Lemon Peel—and we little dreamt, when we called her Lemon Peel, that we were unconsciously moved by the spirit of prophecy. For though she was thirty years of age she succeeded in captivating a widower a few years older than herself, Ephraim Lemon, a master barber and hair-dresser, who used to haunt the area. We youngsters were in the habit of watching for him and playing him tricks, I am afraid, but nothing daunted his ardour. He proposed for Fanny, and she accepted him. Some enterprising tradesmen, when their stock is stale or old-fashioned, put bills in their windows announcing that no reasonable offer will be refused. Fanny Peel, having been long on the shelf, may have thought of this when she accepted Ephraim Lemon's hand. After her marriage she came to see me once a year to pay her respects ; but suddenly her visits became less frequent, until they ceased altogether. For a long time past I had heard nothing of my old nurse.

"It is a fine morning," I said to my wife, "and I shall walk to Fanny's house."

In the course of an hour I presented myself at Mrs. Lemon's street-door, and knocked. She herself opened it to me, and after an anxious scrutiny asked me eagerly to walk in. There was trouble in her face, tempered by an expression of relief when she fully recognised me. She preceded me into her little parlour, and I sat down, awaiting the communication she desired to make. Up to the point of my sitting down the only words exchanged between us were—

From her: "O, sir, it *is* you, and you *have* come!"

From me: "Yes, Fanny ; I hope I am not later than you expected?"

From her: "Not at all, sir. You always was that punkchel that I used to time myself by you."

It is a detail to state that I had not the remotest idea what she meant by this compliment, especially as I had not made an appointment for any particular hour. How-

ever, I did not ask her for an explanation. I addressed her as Fanny quite naturally, and when I followed her into the parlour an odd impression came upon me that I had gone right back into the past, and that I was once more a little boy in pinafores.

The house Mrs. Lemon inhabits is situated in the north of London, in a sadly resigned neighbourhood, which bears a shabby genteel reputation. If I may be allowed such a form of expression I may say that it is respectable in a demi-semi kind of way. I do not mean in respect of its morals, which are unexceptionable, but in respect of its social position. It is situated in a square, and is one of a cluster of tenements so exactly alike in their frontage appearance that were it not for the numbers on the doors a man, that way inclined, might hope for forgiveness for walking in and taking tea with his neighbour's wife instead of with his own. In the centre of the square is an enclosure, bounded by iron railings, which once may have been intended for the cultivation of flowers ; at the present time it contains a few ancient shrubs which nobody ever waters, and which are, therefore, always shabby and dusty in dry weather. Even when it rains they do not attempt to put on an air of liveliness ; it is as though they had settled down to the conviction that their day is over. To this enclosed rural mockery, each tenant in the square is supposed to have a key, but the only use the ground is put to is to shake carpets in, and every person in or out of the neighbourhood is made free of it, by reason of there being no lock to the gate. There are no signs of absolute poverty in the square. Vagrant children do not play at "shops" on the doorsteps and window-sills ; organ men avoid it with a shudder ; beggars walk slowly through, and do not linger ; peripatetic vendors of food never venture there ; and the donkey of the period is unfamiliar with the region. Amusement is provided twice a week by a lanky old gentleman in a long tail coat and a frayed black stock reaching to his ears, whose instrument is a wheezy flute, and whose

repertoire consists of "The Last Rose of Summer" and "Away with Melancholy," which he blows out in a fashion so unutterably mournful and dismal as to suggest to the ingenious mind that his nightly wanderings are part of a punishment inflicted upon him at some remote period for the commission of a dark, mysterious crime.

"It's very good of you to come, sir," said Mrs. Lemon, working her right hand slowly backwards and forwards on a faded black silk dress, which I judged had been put on in honour of my visit. "I hope you are well, sir, and your lady, and your precious family."

I replied that my wife and children were quite well, and that we should be glad to see her at any time. When she heard this she burst into tears.

"You always *was* the kindest-hearted gentleman!" she sobbed. "You never *did* object to being put upon, and you give away your toys that free that all the other children used to take advantage of you. But you didn't mind, sir, not you. Over and over agin have your blessed father said when he was alive, 'That boy'll never git along in the world, he's so soft!'" Mrs. Lemon's tears at this reminiscence flowed more freely. "I can't believe, sir, no, I can't believe as time has flown so quick since those happy, happy days!"

The happy days referred to were, of course, the days of my childhood; and my father's prophecy, which I heard now for the first time, respecting my future, brought a contemplative smile to my lips.

"Ah, sir," said Mrs. Lemon, with a sigh, "if we only knew when we was well off, what a lot of troubles we shouldn't have!"

I nodded assent to this little bit of philosophy, and looked round the room, not dreaming that in the humble apartment I was to receive a clue to the mystery of the murder of pretty Lizzie Melladew.

CHAPTER VI.

I AM HAUNTED BY THREE EVIL-LOOKING OBJECTS IN
MRS. LEMON'S ROOM.

IT was plentifully furnished: stuffed chairs and couch, the latter with a guilty air about it which seemed to say, "I am not what I seem;" a mahogany table in the centre, upon which was an album which had seen very much better days; ornaments on the mantelshelf, bounded on each corner by a lustre with broken pendants; a faded green carpet on the floor; two pictures on the walls; and on a small table near the window a glass case with an evil-looking bird in it. The pictures were portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Lemon in oil-colour. They appeared to have been recently painted, and I made a remark to that effect.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Lemon, in a voice which struck me as being uneasy. "They was done only a few weeks ago." And then, as though the words were forced from her against her will, "Do you see a likeness, sir?"

When she asked this question she was gazing at the portrait of herself.

As a work of art, the painting was a shocking exhibition; as a likeness, it was unmistakable.

"It is," I said, "your very image. Is the portrait of your husband—if that is your husband hanging there—"

She interrupted me with a shudder. "*Hanging* there, sir?"

"I mean on the wall. It is a picture of Mr. Lemon, I presume."

"Yes, sir, it's him."

"Is it as faithful a portrait as your own?"

"It's as like him, sir, as two peas. Egsscept——" but she suddenly paused.

" Except what, Fanny?"

" Nothing, sir, nothing," she said hurriedly.

If, thought I, it is as like him as two peas, there must be something extraordinarily strange and odd in Mr. Lemon. That he was not a good-looking man could be borne with; but that, of his own free will, he should have submitted to be painted and exhibited with such a sly, sinister expression on his face, was decidedly not in his favour. With his thought in my mind I turned involuntarily to the evil-looking bird in the glass case, and, singularly enough, was struck by an absurd and fearful resemblance between the bird's beak and the man's face. Mrs. Lemon's eyes followed mine.

" Have you had that bird long?" I asked.

" Not long, sir," she replied, and her voice trembled.
" About as long as the pictures."

" Did your husband buy it in England? It is a strange bird, and I can't find a name for it."

" Lemon didn't buy it, sir. It was give to him."

I hazarded a guess. " By the artist who painted your husband's portrait?"

" Yes, sir."

Turning from the stuffed bird to the fireplace, I received a shock. In the centre of the mantelshelf was the stone figure of a creature, half monster and half man, with a face bearing such a singular resemblance to Mr. Lemon's and the bird's beak that I rubbed my eyes in bewilderment, believing myself to have suddenly fallen under the influence of a devilish enchantment. But rub my eyes as I might, I could not rub away the strange resemblance. It was no delusion of the senses.

" Was that—that figure, Fanny, given to you by the artist who painted your husband's portrait, and who presented him with that stuffed bird?"

" Yes, sir; he give it to Lemon." And then, in a timorous voice, she asked, " Do you see anything odd in it, sir?"

"It is not only that it's odd," I replied ; "but, if you will excuse me for saying so, Fanny, there is really something horrible about it."

In a low tone Mrs. Lemon said, "That's exactly as I feel, sir."

"Then, why don't you get rid of it?"

"It's more than I dare do, sir. There it is, and there it must remain."

"And there that evil-looking bird is, I suppose, and there that must remain."

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, well," I said, thinking it time to get upon the track, "and now let us talk about something else. You appear to be in trouble."

"You may well say that, sir. I'm worn to skin and bone."

"I'm sorry to hear it, Fanny. Money troubles, I suppose?"

"O, no, sir! We can manage on what we've got, Lemon and me, though he *has* made ducks and drakes with the best part of his savings. Not money troubles, sir; a good deal worser than that."

"Your husband is well, I trust."

"I wish I could say so, sir. No, sir, he's a long way from well, and I didn't know who else to call in, for poor dear Lemon wouldn't stand anybody but you."

Why poor dear Lemon wouldn't stand anybody but me was, to say the least of it, inexplicable ; as, since I used to catch indistinct views of his legs when he came courting Fanny in my father's house, I had never set eyes on him. I made no remark, however, but waited quietly for developments.

"He took to his bed, sir," said Mrs. Lemon, "at a quarter to four o'clock yesterday afternoon ; and it's my opinion he'll never git up from it."

"That is bad news, Fanny. But your letter to me was written before yesterday afternoon."

"Yes, sir; because I felt that things mustn't be allowed to go on as they *are* going on without trying to alter 'em. They was bad enough when I posted my letter to you, sir; but they're a million times worse now. My blood's a-curdling, sir."

"Eh?" I cried, much startled by this solemn matter-of-fact description of the condition of her blood.

"It's curdling inside me, sir, to think of what is going to happen to Lemon!"

"Come, come, Fanny," I expostulated, "you mustn't take things so seriously; it will not mend them. What does the doctor say?"

"Doctor, sir? Love your heart! If I was to take a doctor into Lemon's room now, I wouldn't answer for the consequences."

"That is all nonsense," I said; "he must be reasoned with."

Mrs. Lemon shook her head triumphantly. "You may reason with some men, sir, and you may delood a child; but reason with Lemon—I defy you, sir!"

There was really no occasion for her to do that, as I was there in the capacity of a friend. While we were conversing I made continual unsuccessful attempts to avoid sight of the objects which had produced upon me so disagreeable an impression, but I could not place myself in such a position as to escape the whole three at one and the same time. If I turned my back upon the evil-looking bird and the portrait of Mr. Lemon, the hideous stone figure on the mantelshelf met my gaze; if I turned my back upon that, I not only had a side view of the bird's beak, but a full-faced view of my friend Lemon. Familiarity with these objects intensified my first impressions of them, and at times I could almost fancy that their sinister features moved in mockery of me. There was in them a fiend-like magnetism I found it impossible to resist.

"Does your husband eat well?" I asked.

"Not so well as he used to do, sir."

"Perhaps," I said, hazarding a guess, "he drinks a little too much."

"No, sir, you're wrong there. He likes a glass—we none of us despise it, sir—but he never exceeds."

"Then, in the name of all that's reasonable, Fanny, what is the matter with him?"

Mrs. Lemon turned to her husband's portrait, turned to the stone figure on the mantelshelf, turned to the evil-looking bird; and her frame was shaken by a strong shuddering.

"Is it anything to do with those objects?" I inquired, my wonder and perplexity growing.

"That's what I want you to find out for me, sir, if I can so fur trespass. Don't refuse me, sir, don't! It's a deal to ask you to do, I know, but I shall be everlastingly grateful."

"I am ready to serve you, Fanny," I said gravely, "but at present I am completely in the dark. For instance, this is the first time I have seen those Mephistophelian-looking objects with which you have chosen to decorate your room."

"I didn't choose, sir. It was done, and I daredn't go agin it."

"I have nothing to say to that; I must wait for your explanation. What I was about to remark was, why that evil-beaked bird——"

"Which I wish," she interposed, "had been burnt before it was stuffed."

— "Should bear so strange a resemblance," I continued, "to the portrait of your husband, and why both should bear so strange a resemblance to the stone monster on your mantelshelf, is so very much beyond me, that I cannot for the life of me arrive at a satisfactory solution of the mystery. Surely it cannot spring from a diseased imagination, for you have the same fancy as myself."

"It ain't fancy, sir; it's fact. And the sing'lar part

of it is that the party as brought them all three into the house is as much like them as they are to each other."

"We're getting on solid ground," I said. "The party who brought them into the house—who gave you the stone monster, who painted your husband's portrait and yours, who stuffed the bird; for, doubtless, he was the taxidermist. An Admirable Crichton, indeed, in the way of accomplishments! You see, Fanny, you are introducing me to new acquaintances. You have not mentioned this party before. A man, I presume."

"I suppose so, sir," she said, with an awestruck look.

"Why suppose?" I asked. "In such a case, supposition is absurd. He is, or is not, a man."

"Let us call him so, sir. It'll make things easier."

"Very much easier, and they will be easier still if you will be more explicit. I seem to be getting more and more in the dark. In looking again upon your portrait, Fanny—"

"Yes, sir?"

"I can almost discern a likeness to——"

"For the merciful Lord's sake, sir," she cried, "don't say that! If I thought so, I should go mad. I'm scared enough already with what has occurred and the trouble I'm in—and Lemon talking in his sleep all the night through, and having the most horrible nightmares—and me trembling and shaking in my bed with what I'm forced to hear—it's unbearable, sir; it's unbearable!"

I was becoming very excited. Unless Mrs. Lemon had lost her senses, there was in this common house a frightful and awful mystery. And Mrs. Lemon had sent for me to fathom it! What was I about to hear—what to discover?

I strove to speak in a calm voice.

"You say your husband took to his bed yesterday, and that you fear he will never rise from it. Then he is in bed at this moment?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is his bedroom?"

"On the first floor back, sir."

"Can he hear us talking?"

"No, sir."

"And you want me to see him?"

"Before you go, sir, if you have no objections. I sha'n't know how to thank you."

"I will do what I can for you, Fanny. First for your own sake, and next because there appears to be something going on in this house that ought to be brought to light."

"You may well say that, sir. Not only in this house, but out of this house. The good Lord above only knows what is going on! But Lemon's done nothing wrong, sir. I won't have him thought badly of, and I won't have him hurt. He's been weak, yes, sir, but he ain't been guilty of a wicked, horrible crime. It ain't in his nature, sir. When I first begun to hear things that he used to say in his sleep, and sometimes when he was awake and lost to everything, my hair used to stand on end. I could feel it stirring up, giving me the creeps all over my skin, and my heart'd beat that quick that it was a mercy it didn't jump out of my body. But after a time, frightened as I was, and getting no satisfaction out of Lemon, who only glared at me when I spoke to him, I thought the time might come—and I ain't sure it won't be this blessed day—when I should have to come forward as a witness to save him from the gallows. I am his wife, sir, and if he ain't fit to look after hisself, it's for me to look after him, and so, sir, I thought the best thing for me to do was to keep a dairy."

"A dairy!" I echoed, in wonder.

"Yes, sir, a dairy—to put down in writing everything what happened at the very time."

"O," I said, "you mean a diary!"

"If that's what you call it, sir. I got an old lodger's book that wasn't all filled up. I keep it locked in my desk, sir. Perhaps you'd like to look at it?"

"It may be as well, Fanny."

"If," she said, fumbling in her pocket for a key, and placing one by one upon the table the most extraordinary collection of oddments that female pocket was ever called upon to hold, "if, when we come into this house to retire and live genteel, after Lemon had sold his business, I'd have known what was to come out of my notion to let the second floor front to a single man, I'd have had my feet cut off before I'd done it. But I did it for the best, to keep down the egspenses. Here it is, sir."

CHAPTER VII.

DEVLIN'S FIRST INTRODUCTION INTO THE MYSTERY.

SHE had found the key she had been searching for, and now she opened a mahogany desk, from which she took a penny memorandum-book. She handed it to me in silence, and I turned over the leaves. Most of the pages were filled with weekly accounts of her lodgers, in which "ham and eggs, 8d.;" "a rasher, 5d.;" "chop, 8d.;" "two boyled eggs, 3d.;" "bloater, 2d.;" "crewet, 4d.;" and other such-like items appeared again and again. There was also, at the foot of pages, receipts for payment, "Paid, Fanny Lemon." And this, in the midst of the presumably tragic business upon which we were engaged, brought to my mind an anomaly which had often occurred to me, namely, that landladies should present their accounts to their lodgers in penny memorandum-books, should receive the money, should sign a receipt, and then take away the books containing their acknowledgment of payment. In view of the grave issues impending, it is a trivial matter to comment upon, but it was really a relief to me to dwell for a moment or two upon it. At the end of the memorandum-book which I was looking through were five or six

leaves which had not been utilised for lodgers' accounts, and these Mrs. Lemon had pressed into service for her diary. She was a bad writer and an indifferent speller, and the entries were brief, and, to me, at that point, incomprehensible.

"I see, Fanny," I said "that your first entry is made on a Thursday, a good many weeks ago."

"Yes, sir."

"I must confess I can make nothing of it. It states that Lemon rose at eight o'clock on that morning, that he had breakfast at half-past eight, that he ate four slices of bread and butter, two rashers of bacon, and two eggs—"

"Ah!" sighed Mrs. Lemon, interrupting me. "He had his appetite then, had Lemon! He ain't got none now to speak of."

"And," I continued, "that he went out of the house at nine o'clock with a person whose name is unintelligible. It commences, I think, with a D."

"D-e-v-l-i-n," said Mrs. Lemon, her eyes almost starting out of her head as she spelt the name, letter by letter.

"I can make it out now. That is it, Devlin. A peculiar name, Fanny."

"Everything about him is that, sir, and worse."

"Had it been a common name, I daresay I should have made it out at once. Now, Fanny, who is this Devlin?"

"You called him 'a man, sir,'" said Mrs. Lemon, striving unsuccessfully to keep her eyes from the portrait of her husband, from the evil-beaked bird, and from the image of the stone monster on the mantelshelf.

The magnetism was not in her, it was in the objects, and as she turned from one to the other I also turned—as though I were a piece of machinery and she was setting me in motion. But it is likely that my eyes would have wandered in those directions without her silent prompting. One peculiarity of the fascination—growing more horrible

every moment—exercised by the three objects, was that I could not look upon the one without being compelled to complete the triangle formed by the positions in which they were placed—the wall, the window, the mantelshelf.

"It was Devlin, then," I said, "who painted the portraits and stuffed the bird and gave you the stone monster?"

"You've guessed it, sir. It was him."

Referring to the entry in the memorandum-book, I asked, "Did this Devlin call for your husband on the Thursday morning that they went out together?"

"No, sir, he lodged here."

"Does he lodge here now?"

"Yes, sir, I am sorry to say. If I could only see the last of him I'd give thanks on my bended knees morning, noon, and night."

"Why don't you get rid of him, then?"

"I can't, sir."

I accepted this as part of the mystery, and did not press her on the point, but I asked why she would feel so grateful if he were gone from the house.

"Because," she replied, "it's all through him that Lemon is as he is."

"Am I to see this man before I leave?"

"It ain't for me to say, sir."

"Is he in the house now?"

"No, sir."

I inwardly resolved if he came into the house before I left it, that I would see the man of whom Mrs. Lemon so evidently stood in dread.

"I suppose, Fanny, you will tell me something more of him."

"That is why I asked you to come, sir. If you're to do any good in this dreadful affair, you must know as much as I do about him."

"Very well, Fanny." I referred again to the first entry in the diary. "After stating that your husband went

out with Devlin at nine o'clock in the morning, you say that he returned alone at six o'clock in the evening, and that he did not stir out of the house again on that night."

"Yes, sir."

"I see that you have made a record of the time Lemon went to bed and the time he rose next morning."

"To which, sir, I am ready to take my gospel oath."

"Supposing your gospel oath to be necessary."

"It might be. God only knows!"

I stared at her, beginning to doubt whether she was sane; but there was nothing in her face to justify my suspicion. The expression I saw on it was one of solemn, painful, intense earnestness.

"Go on, sir," she said, "if you please."

I turned again to the concluding words of the first entry, and read them aloud:

"Devlin did not come home all night. I locked the street-door myself, and put up the chain. I went down at seven in the morning, when Lemon was asleep, and the chain was up. I went to Devlin's room, the second floor front, and Devlin was not there!"

"That's true, sir. I can take my gospel oath of that."

"Fanny," I said, with the little book in my hand, closed, but keeping my forefinger between the leaves upon which the first entry was made, "I cannot go any farther until you tell me what all this means."

"After you've finished what I wrote, sir," was her reply, "I'll make a clean breast of it, and tell you everything, or as much of it as I can remember, from the time you saw me last—a good many years ago, wasn't it, sir?—up to this very day."

I thought it best to humour her, and I looked through the remaining entries. They were all of the same kind. Mr. Lemon rose in the morning at such a time; he had breakfast at such a time; he went out at such a time, with or without Devlin; he came home at such a time, with or without Devlin; and so on, and so on. It was a peculiar

feature in these entries that Lemon never went out or came home without Devlin's name being mentioned.

I handed the book back to her ; she took it irresolutely, and asked,

“ Did you read what I last wrote, sir ? ”

“ Yes, Fanny, the usual thing.”

“ Perhaps, sir, but the time I wrote it ; that is what I mean.”

“ No, Fanny, I don't think I noticed that.”

“ It was wrote yesterday, sir, and it fixes the time that Lemon came home on Friday, and that he didn't stir out of the house all the night. If I can swear to anything, sir, I can swear to that. Lemon never crossed the street-door from the minute he came in on Friday to the minute he went out agin yesterday. If it was the last word I spoke, I'd swear to it, and it's the truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God ! ”

I was about to inquire why she laid such particular stress upon these recent movements of her husband, when there flashed into her eyes an expression of such absolute terror and horror that my first thought was that a spectre had entered the room noiselessly, and was standing at my back. Before I had time to turn and look, Mrs. Lemon clutched my arm, and gasped,

“ Do you hear that ? Do you hear that ? ”

CHAPTER VIII.

I MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF GEORGE CARTON'S GUARDIAN,
MR. KENNETH DOWSETT.

I HEARD something certainly which by this time, unhappily, was neither new nor strange. It was the voice of a newsboy calling out the last edition of a newspaper which, he asserted with stentorian lungs, contained further par-

ticulars of the awful murder in Victoria Park. Amid all the jargon he was bawling out, there were really only three words clearly distinguishable. "Murder! Awful murder! Discoveries! Awful discoveries!"

"Are you alarmed, Fanny," I asked, "by what that boy is calling out?"

"Yes," she replied in a whisper, "it is that, it is that!"

"But you must be familiar with the cry," I observed. "There isn't a street in London that was not ringing with it all yesterday."

"It don't matter, it don't matter!" she gasped, in the most inexplicable state of agitation I had ever beheld. "Lemon never stirred out of the house. I'll take my solemn oath of it—my solemn oath."

I released myself from her grasp, and, running into the square, caught up with the newsvendor and bought a paper. Before I returned to the house I satisfied myself that the paper contained nothing new in the shape of intelligence relating to the murder of my friend Melladew's daughter. What the man had bawled out was merely a trick to dispose of his wares. I had reached the doorstep of Fanny's house when my attention was arrested by the figures of two men on the opposite side of the road. One was a man of middle age, and was a stranger to me. In his companion I immediately recognised George Carton. The elder man appeared to be endeavouring to prevail upon George Carton to leave the square, but his arguments had no effect upon Carton, who, shaking him off, hurried across the road to speak to me. His companion followed him.

"Any news, sir?" cried George Carton. "Have you discovered anything?"

"Nothing," I replied, not pausing to inquire why he should put a question so direct to me.

"Nothing!" he muttered. "Nothing! But it shall be brought to light—it shall, or I will not live!"

"Come, come, my dear boy," said the elder man.

"What is the use of going on in this frantic manner? It won't better things."

"How am I to be sure of that?" retorted Carton. "It won't better things to stand idly aside, and think and think about it without ever moving a step."

"My ward knows you, sir," said Carton's friend, "and I confess I was endeavouring to persuade him to come home with me when you were running after the newspaper boy. He insisted that your sudden appearance in this square was a strange and eventful coincidence."

"A strange and eventful coincidence!" I exclaimed, and thought, without giving my thought expression, that there was something strange in the circumstance of my being in Fanny Lemon's house, about to listen to a revelation which was not unlikely to have some bearing upon the tragic event, and in being thus unexpectedly confronted by the young man who was to have been married to the murdered girl.

"Yes, that is his idea," said Carton's friend; "but I am really forgetting my manners. Allow me to introduce myself. You are acquainted with my ward, George Carton, the dearest, most generous-hearted, most magnanimous young fellow in the world. I have the happiness to be his guardian. My name is Kenneth Dowsett."

He was a smiling, fair-faced man, with blue, dreamy eyes, and his voice and manners were most agreeable. I murmured that I was very pleased to make his acquaintance.

"My ward," continued Mr. Dowsett, laying his hand affectionately on Carton's shoulder, "has also an odd idea in reference to this dreadful affair, that something significant and pregnant will be discovered in an odd and unaccountable fashion. Heaven knows, I don't want to deprive him of any consolation he can derive from his imaginings. I have too sincere a love for him; but I am a man of the world, and it grieves me to see him indulge in fancies which can lead to no good result. To

tell you the honest truth," Mr. Dowsett whispered to me, "I am afraid to let him out of my sight for fear he should do violence to himself."

"My dear guardian," said Carton, "who should know better than I how kind and good you are to me? Who should be better able to appreciate the tenderness and consideration I have always received at your hands? I may be wilful, headstrong, but I am not ungrateful. Indeed, sir"—turning to me—"I am wild with grief and despair, and my guardian has the best of reasons for chiding me. He has only my good at heart, and I am truly sorry to distress him; but I have my ideas—call them fancies if you like—and I must have something to cling to. I will not abandon my pursuit till the murderer is brought to justice, or till I kill him with my own hands!"

"That is how he has been going on," said Mr. Dowsett, "all day yesterday, and the whole live-long night. He hasn't had a moment's sleep."

"Sleep!" cried Carton. "Who could sleep under such agony as I am suffering?"

"But," I said to the young man, whose intense earnestness deepened my sympathy for him, "sleep is necessary. It isn't possible to work without it. There are limits to human strength, and if you wish to be of any service in the clearing up of this mystery, you must conduct yourself with some kind of human wisdom."

"There, my dear lad," said Mr. Dowsett, "doesn't that tally with my advice? I tried to prevail upon him last night to take an opiate——"

"And I wouldn't," interrupted Carton, "and I said I would never forgive you if you administered it to me without my knowledge. Never, never will I take another!" Mr. Dowsett looked at him reproachfully, and the young man added, "There—I beg your pardon. I did not mean to refer to it again."

"If I have erred at all in my behaviour towards you, my dear lad, it is on the side of indulgence. Still," said Mr.

Dowsett, addressing me, "that does not mean that I shall give up endeavouring to persuade George to do what is sensible. As matters stand, who is the better judge, he or I? Just look at the state he is in now, and tell me whether he is fit to be trusted alone. My fear is that he will break down entirely."

"I agree with your guardian," I said to Carton; "he is your best adviser."

"I know, I know," said the young man, "and I ought to be ashamed of myself for causing him so much uneasiness. But, after all, sir, I am not altogether in the wrong. I saw Mr. Portland last night, and he said that you and he had had an important interview about this dreadful occurrence."

"I was not aware," I observed, "that you were acquainted with any of the elder members of your poor Lizzie's family."

"I was not," rejoined Carton, "till last night. I introduced myself to Mr. Portland, and told him all that had passed between poor Lizzie and me. I did not have courage enough to go and see Mr. and Mrs. Melladew, but Mr. Portland was very kind to me, and he said that you had undertaken to unravel the mystery."

I did not contradict this unauthorised statement on the part of Mr. Portland, not wishing to get into an argument and prolong the conversation unnecessarily; indeed, it would have been disingenuous to say anything to the contrary, for it really seemed to me in some dim way that I was on the threshold of a discovery in connection with the murder.

"Hearing this welcome news from Mr. Portland," continued Carton, "you would not have me believe that my meeting with you now in a square I never remember to have passed through in my life is accidental? No, there is more in it than you or I can explain."

"What brought you here, then?" I inquired. "Were you aware I was in this neighbourhood?"

"No," replied Carton, "I had not the slightest idea of it."

"He followed the newsboy," explained Mr. Dowsett, "of whom you bought a paper just now. These people, crying out the dreadful news, excercise a kind of fascination over my dear George. I give you my word, he seems to be in a waking dream as he follows in their footsteps."

"I am in no dream," said Carton. "I am on the alert, on the watch. I gaze at the face of every man and woman I pass for signs of guilt. Where is the murderer, the monster who took the life of my poor girl? Not in hiding! It would draw suspicion upon him. He is in the streets, and I may meet him. If I do, if I do——"

"You see," whispered Mr. Dowsett to me, "how easy it would be for him to get into serious trouble if he had not a friend at his elbow."

"What good," I said, addressing Carton, "can you, in reason, expect to accomplish by wearing yourself out in the way you are doing?"

"It will lead me to the end," replied Carton, putting his hand to his forehead; and there was in his tone, despite his denial, a dreaminess which confirmed Mr. Dowsett's remark, "and then I do not care what becomes of me!"

Mr. Dowsett gazed at his ward solicitously, and passed his arm around him sympathisingly.

"Would it be a liberty, sir," said Carton, "to ask what brings you here?"

"I came on a visit to an old friend," I replied evasively, "whom I have not seen for years, and who wished to consult me upon her private affairs."

"Pardon me for my rudeness," he said, with a pitiful, deprecatory movement of his shoulders. "In what you have undertaken for Mr. Portland, will you accept my assistance?"

"If I see that it is likely to be of any service, yes, most certainly."

"Give me something to do," he said in a husky tone, "give me some clue to follow. This suspense is maddening."

"I will do what I can. And now I must leave you. My friend will wonder what is detaining me."

"But one word more, sir. Have you heard any news of Mary?"

"None. So far as I know, she is still missing. If we could find her we should, perhaps, learn the truth."

"Should you need me," said Carton, "you know my address. I gave you my card yesterday, but you may have mislaid it. Here is another. I live with my guardian. It is a good thing for me that I am not left alone. But, good God! what am I saying? I am alone—alone! My Lizzie, my poor Lizzie, is dead!"

As I turned into the house I caught a last sight of him standing irresolutely on the pavement, his guardian in the kindest and tenderest manner striving to draw him away.

Fanny was waiting for me at the door of her little parlour. There was a wild apprehensive look in her eyes as they rested on my face.

"What has kep you so long, sir?" she asked in a low tone of fear.

"I came across an acquaintance accidentally," I replied.

"A policeman, sir, or a detective?"

"Good heavens, neither!" I exclaimed.

A sigh of relief escaped her, but immediately afterwards she became anxious again.

"You was talking a long time, sir."

"It was not my fault, Fanny."

"Was—was Lemon's name mentioned, sir?"

"No."

"Was there nothing said about him?"

"Not a word."

This assurance plainly took a weight from her mind. She glanced at the paper I held in my hand, and said:

"Is there anything new in it, sir? Is the murderer caught?"

"No," I replied; "the paper contains nothing that has not appeared in a hundred other newspapers yesterday and to-day. Fanny, I am about to speak to you now very seriously."

"I'm listening, sir."

"Has Mr. Lemon, your husband, anything to do with this dreadful deed?"

"He had no hand in it, sir, as I hope for mercy! I'll tell you everything I know, as I said I would; but it must be in my own way, and you mustn't interrupt me."

I decided that it would be useless to put any further questions to her, and that I had best listen patiently to what she was about to impart. I told her that I would give her my best attention, and I solemnly impressed upon her the necessity of concealing nothing from me. She nodded, and pouring out a glass of water, drank it off. A silence of two or three minutes intervened before she had sufficiently composed herself to commence, and during that silence the feeling grew strong within me that Providence had directed my steps to her house.

The tale she related I now set down in her own words as nearly as I can recall them. Of all the stories I had ever heard or read, this which she now imparted to me was the most fantastic and weird, and it led directly to a result which to the last hour of my life I shall think of with wonder and amazement.

CHAPTER IX.

FANNY LEMON RELATES UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES SHE RESOLVED TO LET HER SECOND FLOOR FRONT.

"I MUST go back sir," she commenced, "a few years, else you won't be able to understand it properly. I'll run over them years as quick as possible, and won't say more about e'm than is necessary, because I know you are as

anxious as I am to come to the horrible thing that has just happened. I was a happy woman in your angel father's house, but when Lemon come a-courting me I got that unsettled that I hardly knew what I was about. Well, sir; as you know, we got married, and I thought I was made for life, and that honey was to be my portion evermore. I soon found out my mistake, though I don't suppose I had more to complain of than other women. In the early days things went fairly well between me and Lemon. We had our little fall-outs and our little differences, but they was soon made up. We ain't angels, sir, any of us, and when we're tied together we soon find it out. I dare-say it's much of a muchness on the men's side as well as on our'n. Lemon is quick-tempered, but it's all over in a minute, and he forgits and forgives. Leastways, that is how it used to be with him ; he would fly out at me like a flash of lightning, and be sorry for it afterwards ; and one good thing in him was that he never sulked and never brooded. It ain't so now ; he's growed that irritable that it takes more than a woman's patience to bear with him ; he won't stand contradiction, and the littlest of things'll frighten him and make him as weak as a child unborn. There was only a couple of nights ago. He'd been going on that strange that it was as much as I could do to keep from screaming out loud and alarming the neighbourhood, and right in the middle of it all he fell asleep quite sudden. It was heavenly not to hear the sound of his voice, but I couldn't help pitying him when I saw him laying there, with the prespiration starting out of his forehead, and I took a cool handkercher and wiped the damp away, and smoothed his hair back from his eyes.

"He woke up as sudden as he went off, and when he felt my hand on his head he burst out crying and begged me to forgive him. Not for the way he'd been storming at me—no, sir, he didn't beg my forgiveness for that, but for something else he wouldn't or couldn't understandingly explain.

" 'What do you mean by it all ?' I said. ' What do you mean by it all ?'

" But though I as good as went on my bended knees to git it out of him, it wasn't a bit of good. I might as well have spoke to a stone stature. Lemon's had a scare, sir, a frightful awful scare, and I don't know what to think.

" When I married him, sir, he kep a saloon, as I dare-say you remember hearing of ; shaving threepence, hair-cutting fourpence, shampooing ditter. He had a wax lady's head in the winder as went round by machinery, and Lemon kep it regularly wound up with her hair dressed that elegant that it would have been a credit to Burlington Arcade. There used to be a crowd round his winder all day long, and girls and boys 'd come a long way to have a good look at it ; and though I say it, she was worth looking at. Her lips was like bits of red coral, and you could see her white teeth through 'em ; her skin was that pearly and her cheeks that rosy as I never saw equalled ; and as for her eyes, sir, they was that blue that they had to be seen to be believed. She carried her head on one side as she went round and round, looking slantways over her right shoulder, and, taking her altogether, she was as pritty a exhibition as you could see anywhere in London. It brought customers to Lemon, there was no doubt of that ; he was doing a splendid trade, and we put by a matter of between four and five pounds a week after all expenses paid. It *did* go agin me, I own, when I discovered that Lemon had female customers, and, what's more, a private room set apart to do 'em up in ; but when I spoke to him about he said, with a stern eye :

" 'What do you object to ? The ladies ?'

" 'Not so much the ladies, Lemon,' I answered, ' as the private room.'

" 'O,' said he, 'the private room ?'

" 'Yes,' said I ; 'I don't think it proper.'

" 'Don't you ?' said he, getting nasty. ' Well, I do,

and there's a end of it. You mind your business, Fanny, and I'll mind mine.'

"I saw that he meant it and didn't intend to give way, and I consequenchuallly held my tongue. Even when I was told that Lemon often went out to private houses to dress ladies' hair I thought it best to say nothing. I had my feelings, but I kep 'em to myself. I'm for peace and harmony, sir, and I wish everybody was like me.

"One night Lemon give me a most agreeable surprise. He came home and said :

"‘Fanny, what would you like best in the world?’

"There was a question to put to a woman ! I thought of everything, without giving anything a name. The truth is I was knocked over, so to speak.

"Lemon spoke up agin. ‘What would you say, Fanny, if I told you I was going to sell the business and retire ?’

"‘No, Lemon !’ I cried, for I thought he was trying me with one of his jokes.

"‘Yes, Fanny,’ he said, ‘it’s what I’ve made up my mind to. I’ve been thinking of it a long time, and now I’m going to do it.’

"I saw that he was in real rightdown earnest, and I was that glad that I can’t egspress.

"‘Lemon,’ I said, when I got cool, ‘can we afford it ?’

"‘Old woman,’ he answered ‘we’ve got a matter of a hundred and fifty pound a year to live on, and if that ain’t enough for the enjoyment of life, I should like to know how much more you want ?’

"He had his light moments had Lemon before certain things happened. People as didn’t know him well thought him nothing but a grumpy, crusty man. Well, sir, he was that mostly, but with them as was intimate he cracked his joke now and then, and it used to do my heart good to hear him.

"So it was settled, sir. Lemon actually sold his

business, and we retired. Five year ago almost to the very day we took this house and become fashionable.

"It was a bit dull at first. Lemon missed his shop, and his customers, and his wax lady, that he'd growed to look upon almost like flesh and blood; but he practised on my head for hours together with his crimping irons and curling tongs, and that consoled him a little. He used to pretend it was all real, and that I was one of his reg'lars, and while he was gitting his things ready he'd speak about the weather and the news in a manner quite perfessional. When he come into the room of a morning at eleven or twelve o'clock with his white apern on and his comb stuck in his hair, and say, 'Good morning, ma'am, a beautiful day,'—which was the way he always begun, whether it was raining or not—I'd take my seat instanter in the chair, and he'd begin to operate. I humoured him, sir! it was my duty to; and though he often screwed my hair that tight round the tongs that I felt as if my eyes was starting out of my head, I never so much as murmured.

"We went on in this way for nearly three years, and then Lemon took another turn. Being retired, and living, like gentlefolk, on our income, we got any number of circul-lars, and among 'em a lot about companies, and how to make thousands of pounds without risking a penny. I never properly understood how it came about; all I know is that Lemon used to set poring over the papers and writing down figgers and adding 'em up, and that at last he got speculating and dabbling and talking wild about making millions. From that time he spoke about nothing but Turks, and Peruvians, and Egyptians, and Bulls, and Bears, and goodness only knows what other outlandish things; and sometimes he'd come home smiling, and sometimes in such a dreadful temper that I was afraid to say a word to him. One thing, after a little while, I did understand, and that was that Lemon was losing money instead of making it by his goings on with his Turks, and Peruvians, and Egyptians, and his Bulls and Bears'; and as I was

beginning to git frightened as to how it was all going to end, I plucked up courage to say,

“ ‘ Lemon, is it worth while?’

“ ‘ And all the thanks I got was,

“ ‘ Jest you hold your tongue. Haven’t I got enough to worrit me that you must come nagging at me?’

“ He snapped me up so savage that I didn’t dare to say another word, but before a year was out he sung to another tune. He confessed to me with tears in his eyes that he’d been chizzled out of half the money we retired on, and it was a blessed relief to me to hear him say,

“ ‘ I’ve done with it, Fanny, for ever. They don’t rob me no longer with their Bulls and their Bears.’

“ ‘ A joyful hour it is to me, Lemon,’ I cried, ‘ to hear them words. The life I’ve led since you took up with Bulls and Bears and all the other trash, there’s no describing. But now we can be comfortable once more. Never mind the money you’ve lost; I’ll make it up somehow.’

“ It was then I got the idea of letting the second floor front. As it’s turned out, sir, it was the very worst idea that ever got into my head, and what it’s going to lead to the Lord above only knows.

CHAPTER X.

DEVLIN THE BARBER TAKES FANNY’S FIRST FLOOR FRONT.

“ OUR first lodger, sir, was a clerk in the City, and he played the bassoon that excruciating that our lives become a torment. The neighbours all complained, and threatened to bring me and Lemon and the young man and his bassoon before the magerstrates. I told the clerk that he’d have to give up the second floor front or the bassoon, and that he might take his choice. He took his choice, and went

away owing me one pound fourteen, and I haven't seen the colour of his money from that day to this.

"Our second lodger was a printer, who worked all night and slept all day. I could have stood him if it hadn't turned out that he'd run away from his wife,' who found out where he was living, and give us no peace. She was a dreadful creature, and I never saw her sober. She smelt of gin that strong that you knew a mile off when she was coming. 'That's why I left her, Mrs. Lemon,' the poor man said to me; 'she's been the ruin of me. Three homes has she sold up, and she's that disgraced me that it makes me wild to hear the sound of her voice. The law won't help me, and what am I to do?' I made him a cup of tea, and said I was very sorry for him, but that she wasn't *my* wife, and that I'd take it kind of him if he'd find some other lodgings. All he said was, 'Very well, Mrs. Lemon, I can't blame you; but don't be surprised if you read in the papers one day that I am brought up for being the death of her, or that I've made a hole in the water. If she goes on much longer, one of them things is sure to happen.' He went away sorrowful, and paid me honourable to the last farthing.

"It wasn't encouraging, sir, but I didn't lose heart. 'The third time's lucky,' I said to myself, as I put the bill in the winder agin, little dreaming what was to come of it. It remained there nigh on a fortnight, when a knock come at the street-door.

"I do all the work in the house myself. A body may be genteel without keeping a parcel of servants to eat you out of house and home, and sauce you in the bargain. A knock come at the street-door, as I said. If I'd known what I know now, the party as knocked might have knocked till he was blue in the face, or dropped down in a fit before he'd got me to answer him. But I had no suspicions, and I went and opened the door, and there I saw a tall, dark man, with a black moustache, curled up at the ends.

"'You've got a bill in the winder,' said he, 'of a room to let.'

"'Yes, sir,' I answered, hardly giving myself time to look at him, I was that glad of the chance of letting the room; 'would you like to see it?'

"'I should,' said he.

"And in he walked, and up the stairs, after me, to the second floor front. It didn't strike me at the time, but it did often afterwards when I listened for 'em in vain, that I didn't hear his footsteps as he foller'd me up-stairs. Never, from the moment he entered this house, have I heard the least sound from his feet, and yet he wears what looks like boots. He's never asked me to clean 'em, and I'd rather be torn to pieces with red hot pinchers than do it now.

"'It's a cheerful room, sir,' said I to him. 'Looks out on the square.'

"'Charming,' he said, 'the room, the square, you, everything.'

"'That's a funny way of talking,' I thought, and I said out loud, 'Do you think it will suit, sir?'

"'Do I think it will suit?' he said. 'I am sure it will suit. I take it from this minute. What's the rent?'

"'With attendance, sir?' I asked.

"'With or without attendance,' he answered; 'it matters not.'

"Not 'It don't matter,' as ordinary people say, but 'It matters not,' for all the world like one of them foreign fellers we see on the stage. I told him the rent, reckoning attendance, and he said:

"'Good. The bargain is made. I am yours, and you are mine.'

"And then he laughed in a way that almost made my hair stand on end. It wasn't the laugh of a human creature; there was something unearthly about it. As a rule, a body's pleased when another body laughs, but this laugh made me shiver all over; you know the sensation, sir, like cold water running down your back. Then, and a good many times since when he's been speaking or laugh-

ing, I felt myself turn faint with sech a swimming sensation that I had to ketch hold of something to keep myself from sinking to the ground.

"'I beg your pardon, sir,' I said, when I come to, 'but if you've no objections I'd like a reference.'

"'Of course you would,' he said, laughing again, 'and here it is.'

"With that he gives me a sovering, and orders me to light the fire. There's that about him as makes it impossible not to do as he orders you to, so on my knees I went there and then, and lit the fire.

"'Good,' he said. 'I couldn't have done it better myself. Mrs. Lemon—' and you might have knocked me down with a feather when I heard him speak my name. How did he get to know it? I never told him.—'Mrs. Lemon,' said he, 'I see in your face that you'd like to ask me a question or two.'

"'I would, sir,' I said, shaking and trembling all over. 'If I may make so bold, sir, are you a married man?'

"He put his hand on his heart, and, grinning all over his face, answered, 'Mrs. Lemon, I am, and have ever been, single.'

"'Might I be so bold as to ask your name, sir?' I said.

"'Devlin,' said he.

"'Dev—what?' I garsped.

"'Lin,' said he. 'Devlin. I'll spell it for you. D-e-v-l-i-n. Have you got it well in your mind?'

"'I have, sir,' I said, very faint.

"'Good,' said he, pointing to the door. 'Go.'

"I had to go, sir, and I went, and that is how Mr. Devlin become our lodger.

CHAPTER XI.

DEVLIN PERFORMS SOME WONDERFUL TRICKS, FASCINATES MR. LEMON; AND STRIKES TERROR TO THE SOUL OF FANNY LEMON.

"THAT very night Mr. Devlin come down to this room, without 'with your leave or by your leave,' where Lemon and me was setting, having our regular game of cribbage for a ha'penny a game, and droring a chair up to the table, he begun to talk as though he'd known us all his life. And he *can* talk, sir, by the hour, and it never seems to tire him, whatever it does with other people. Lemon was took with him, and couldn't keep his eyes off him. No more could I, sir. No more could you if he was here. You might try your hardest, but it wouldn't be a bit of good. There's something in him as forces you to look at him—just as there's something in that bird, and the stone figger on the mantelshelf, and Lemon's portrait as forces you to look at *them*. I've found out the reason of that. When Devlin ain't here *he leaves his sperrit behind him*—that's how it is. I was never frightened of the dark before he come into the house, but now the very thought of going into a room of a night without a candle makes me shiver. And many and many's the time as I've been going up-stairs that I've turned that faint there's no describ-ing. He's been behind me, sir, coming up after me, step by step. I can't see him, I can't hear him, but I feel him; and yet there ain't a soul in sight but me. At them times I'm frightened to look at the wall for fear of seeing his shadder.

"Well, sir, on the night that he come into this parlour he goes on talking and talking, and then proposes a hand at cribbage, which Lemon was only too glad to say yes to.

" 'Mrs. Lemon must play,' said Devlin ; ' we'll have a three-handed game.'

" I shouldn't have minded being left out, especially as our cribbage-board only pegs for two, but his word was law. So we begun to play, and Devlin marks his score with a red pencil.

" The things he did while we played made my flesh creep. He threw out his card for crib without looking at it, and told us how much was in crib while the cards was laying backs up on the table ; and when Lemon and me, both of us slow counters, began to reckon what we had in our hands, Mr. Devlin, like a flash of lightning, cried out how many we was to take. We played five games, and he won 'em all. Then he said he'd show us some tricks. Sir, the like of them tricks was never seen before or since. I've seen conjurers in my time, but not one who could hold a candle to Mr. Devlin. He made the cards fly all over the room, and while he held the pack in his hand and you was looking at 'em, they'd disappear before your very eyes.

" 'Where would you like 'em to be ?' he asked. ' Underneath you, on your chair ? Git up ; you're sitting on 'em. In your workbox ? Open it and behold 'em.'

" And there they was, sir, sure enough, underneath me, though I'd never stirred from my seat, or in my workbox, which was at the other end of the room. It wasn't conjuring, sir, it was something I can't put a name to, and it wasn't natural. I could hardly move for fright, and as I looked at Mr. Devlin, he seemed to grow taller and thinner, and his black eyes become blacker, and his moustaches curled up to his nose till they as good as met. But Lemon didn't feel as I felt ; he was that delighted that he kep on crying—

" 'Wonderful ! Beautiful ! Do it agin, Mr. Devlin, do it agin. Show us another.'

" I don't know when I've seen him so excited ; that Devlin had bewitched him.

"‘We’re brothers you and me,’ said Devlin to him. ‘I am yours, and you are mine, and we’ll never part.’

“The very words, sir, he’d used to me.

“‘Hooray!’ cried Lemon, ‘we’re brothers, you and me, and we’ll never, never part.’

“‘I once kep a barber’s shop myself,’ said Devlin.

“‘What!’ cried Lemon, ‘are you one of us?’

“‘I am,’ said Devlin, ‘and I’ve worked for the best in the trade—for Truefitt and Shipwright, and all the rest of ‘em. I’ve been abroad studying the new styles. I’ll show you something as ’ll make you open your eyes, something splendid.’

“And before I knew where I was, sir, Devlin, in his shirt-sleeves, had whipped a large towel round my neck, and had my hair all down, and was beginning to dress it. Where he got the towel from, and the combs, and the curling-tongs, and the fire, goodness only knows. I didn’t see him take them from nowhere, but there they was on the table, and there was Devlin, with his hands in my hair, frizzling it up and corkscrewing it, and twisting and twirling it, and me setting in the chair for all the world as if I’d been turned into stone. But though I didn’t have the power to move, I could think about things, and what come into my head was that the man as had taken the second floor front must be some unearthly creature, sprung from I won’t mention where.

“‘Do you really believe so?’ whispered Devlin in my ear.

“‘Believe what?’ I asked, though my throat was that hot and dry that I wondered how he could make out what I said.

“‘That I am an unearthly creature,’ he said softly, ‘sprung from a place which shouldn’t be mentioned to ears perlite?’

“If I was petrified before, sir, you may guess how I felt when I found out that he knew what I was thinking of.

“‘You shouldn’t be, you shouldn’t be,’ he whispered agin.

" 'Shouldn't be what ?' I managed to git out, though the words almost stuck to the roof of my mouth.

" 'Sorry you ever took me as a lodger,' he said with a grin. ' Fye, fy ! It isn't grateful of you after sech a good reference as I give you. Something 'll happen to you if you don't mind.'

" Well, sir, it was true I'd thought it, but I'll take my solemn oath I never spoke it. It was jest as though that Devlin had my brains spread open before him, and could see every thought as was passing through 'em. I was so overcome that I as good as swooned away, and I believe I should have gone off in a dead faint if he hadn't put something strong to my nose as made me almost sneeze my head off. And while I was sneezing, there was Devlin and Lemon laughing fit to burst theirselves. All the time he was dressing my hair that sort of thing was going on; there wasn't a thought that come into my head that he didn't tell me of the minute it was there, till he got me into that state that I hardly knew whether I was asleep or awake. At last, sir, he finished me up, and stepping back a little, he waved his hand and said to Lemon,

" 'There ! what do you think of that ?' meaning my hair.

" 'Wonderful ! Beautiful !' cried Lemon, clapping his hands and jumping up and down in his chair, he was that egscited. ' I never saw nothing like it in all my whole born days. It's a new style—quite a new style, and so taking ! The ladies 'll go wild over it. Where did you git it from ?'

" 'From a place,' said Devlin, grinning right in my face, 'as shall be nameless.'

" 'But you'll tell me some day, won't you ?' cried Lemon. ' Because there might be other styles there as good as that, and we could make our fortunes out of 'em.'

" 'I'll take you there one day,' said Devlin, with an unearthly laugh, 'and you shall see for yourself.'

" 'Do, do !' screamed Lemon. ' I'd give anythin'd that the world to go there with you !'

" 'Good Lord save him !' I thought, looking at Lemon whose eyes was almost starting out of his head. ' He's going mad, he's going mad !'

" 'As to making our fortunes,' Devlin went on, ' why not ? It shall be so.'

" 'It shall, it shall !' cried Lemon.

" 'We'll make hundred's, thousand's,' said Devlin.

" 'We will, we will !' cried Lemon. ' Fanny shall ride in her own kerridge.'

" 'Fanny shall,' said Devlin.

" 'The Lord forbid,' I thought, ' that I should ever ride in a kerridge bought at sech a price !'

" I thought more free now that Devlin's hands was not in my hair ; he didn't seem to be able to read what I was thinking of so long as we was apart.

" 'I bind myself to you,' said Devlin to my poor dear Lemon, ' and you bind yourself to me. The bargain's made. Your hand upon it.'

" Lemon gave him his hand, and whether it was fancy or not, it seemed to me that Devlin grew and grew till he almost touched the ceiling ; and that, while he was bending over Lemon and looking down on him, like one of them vampires you've read of, sir, Lemon kep growing smaller and smaller till he was no better than a bag of bones.

" 'We go out to-morrer morning,' said Devlin, ' you and me together, to look for a shop. Is it agreed ?'

" 'It is,' answered Lemon, 'it is.'

" 'We will set London on fire,' said Devlin.

" 'We will, we will,' said Lemon ; ' and we'll have shops all over it.'

" 'You're a man of sperrit,' said Devlin. ' I kiss your hand.'

" He said that to me ; but I clapped my hands behind my back.

" 'If you refuse,' said Devlin, smiling at me all the while, ' I must show Lemon another style.'

‘ And he made as though he was about to dress my hair.’

“ ‘ No, no ! ’ I screamed ; ‘ anything but that, anything but that ! ’

“ I give him my hand, and he kissed it. His mouth was like burning hot coals, and I wondered I wasn’t scarred.

“ ‘ Don’t forgit,’ said Lemon, ‘ to-morrow morning.’

“ ‘ I’ll not forgit,’ said Devlin. ‘ Till then, adoo.’

“ The next minute he was gone.

“ No sooner did he close the door behind him than I felt as if tons weight had been lifted off me. I started up, and put my hands to my hair, intending to pull it down.

“ ‘ What are you doing ? ’ cried Lemon, starting up too, and seizing hold of me. ‘ Don’t touch it—don’t touch it ! I must study the style. I never saw sech a thing in all my life. It’s more than wonderful, its stoopendous. You look like another woman. Jest take a sight of yerself in the glass.’

“ I did take a sight of myself in the glass, and if you’ll believe me, sir, it seemed as if my head was covered with millions of little serpents, curling and twisting all sorts of ways at once ; and, as I looked at ‘em moving, sir—which might have been or might not have been, but so it was to me—I saw millions of eyes shining and glaring at me.

“ ‘ O, Lemon, Lemon ! ’ I cried, bursting out into tears ; ‘ what have you done, what have you done ? ’

“ ‘ Done ? ’ said Lemon, rubbing his hands ; he’d let mine go. ‘ Why, gone into partnership with the finest hair-dresser as ever was seen. Our fortune’s made, Fanny, our fortune’s made ! ’

“ I tried to reason with him, but I might as well have spoke to stone. He was that worked up that he wouldn’t listen to a word I said. All the satisfaction I could git out of him was—

“ ‘ A good night’s work, Fanny ; a good night’s work ! ’

“ If he said it once he said it fifty times. But I knew

it was the worst night's work Lemon had ever done, and that it'd come to bad. And it has, sir.

CHAPTER XII.

FANNY LEMON RELATES HOW HER HUSBAND, AFTER BECOMING BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH DEVLIN THE BARBER, SEEMED TO BE HAUNTED BY SHADOWS AND SPIRITS.

"I HAD my way about my hair before I went to bed. I waited till Lemon was asleep, and then I brushed all the serpents out, and did it up in a plain knot behind. I felt then like a Christian, and I said my prayers before I stepped in between the sheets. I didn't sleep much ; Lemon was that restless he torsed and torsed the whole night long, and his eyes was quite bloodshot when he got up. While he was dressing I heard Devlin call out :

"'Lemon, I'm coming down to have breakfast with you.'

"'Do,' cried Lemon. "'You're heartily welcome.'

"I was down-stairs at the time—I always git up before Lemon, to make the place straight and cook the breakfast—and I heard what passed. Lemon, half-dressed, come running down to me, and told me to be sure to git something nice for breakfast, and not to cut the rashers too thin.

"'Go to the fish-shop,' he said, 'and git a haddick. We must treat him well, Fanny, or he might cry off the bargain he made with me last night.'

"I thought to myself I knew how I'd treat him if I had my way, but it wouldn't have done jest then for me to go agin Lemon. There was times when he said a thing that it had to be done, and that was one of 'em. So I goes to the fishmonger's and gits a haddick, and I cooks three large rashers and six eggs—three fried and three biled

—and then Lemon and Devlin they come in together as thick as thieves. Devlin had been telling Lemon something as had made him laugh till his face was purple.

“‘ You never heard sech a man,’ said Lemon to me. ‘ He’s one in a thousand.’

“‘ He’s one in millions,’ I thought, and I kep my head down for fear Devlin should suspect what I was thinking of; ‘ and there’s only one as ever I heard of.’

“Devlin give me good morning and shook hands with me ; I didn’t dare to refuse him. If he’d offered to kiss me, Lemon wouldn’t have objected, I believe, though there was a time when he was that jealous of me that a man hardly dared to look at me. But those happy days was gone for ever.

“I didn’t have much appetite for breakfast, and no more had Lemon, but Devlin made up for the pair of us. There was the haddick, and there was the three rashers, and there was the six eggs. Devlin pretty well cleared the lot. It was Lemon, I *must* say, who pushed him on to it, though it didn’t seem to me as he wanted much persuading. He had the appetite of a shark. It didn’t give me no pleasure to hear him praise my cooking and to hear him say to Lemon that he’d got a treasure of a wife.

“‘ I have,’ said Lemon ; ‘ Fanny’s a good sort.’

“When breakfast was over and everything cleared away Lemon asked Devlin if he was ready, and Devlin said he was, and they went out arm in arm jest as if they was brothers.

“They come home late, and Lemon was more excited than ever.

“‘ It’s all settled, Fanny,’ he said, ‘ I’ve taken another shop, and Devlin and me’s gone into partnership. We’re going to work together, and we’ll astonish your weak nerves.’

“As if they hadn’t been astonished enough already.

"I asked Lemon where the shop was that he'd taken, but he wouldn't tell me.

"'It's a secret,' he said, 'between Devlin and me. What an egstrordinary man he is, Fanny! What a glorious, glorious fellow! What a fortunate thing that he saw the bill in our winder of a room to let, and that he didn't go somewherees else! It's a providence, Fanny, that's what it is.'

"I wasn't to be put down so easy, and I tried my hardest to git out of Lemon where the shop was, but he wouldn't let on.

"'I've promised Devlin,' he said, 'not to say a word about it to a living soul. Perhaps we sha'n't keep it open long; perhaps we shall shut it up after a month or two and take another; perhaps we shall do a lot of trade at private houses. It's all as Devlin likes. I've give him the lead. There never was sech a man.'

"That was all I could git out of him. Devlin had him tight; 'twas nothing but Devlin this, and Devlin that, and Devlin t'other. Devlin was as close as he was; I couldn't git nothing out of him.

"'I love wimmin,' he said, 'but they must be kep in their place. Eh, Lemon?'

"That was a nice thing for a wife to 'hear, wasn't it?

"'Yes,' said Lemon: 'you mind your business, Fanny, and we'll mind our'n.'

"They went out the next morning together, and kep out late agin; and so it went on for a matter of four or five weeks. Then there come a change. From being in love with Devlin, Lemon begun to be frightened of him. I saw it in his face every morning when they went away. Instead of Lemon's taking Devlin's arm as he did at first, it was Devlin who used to take Lemon's arm, jest above the elber jint, as much as to say:

"'I've got you, and I'm not going to let you escape me.'

"And instead of Lemon being brisk and lively and egscited of a morning, as though he was going for an excursion in a pleasure van, he got grumpy and dull, as though he was going to the lock-up to answer for some dreadful thing he'd done. I spoke to him about it, but if he was close before, he was a thousand times closer now.

"'Don't ask me nothing, Fanny,' he'd say; 'don't put questions to me about *him*. I daren't say a word, I daren't, I daren't!'

"That didn't stop me; he was my husband, and if strange things was being done, who had a better right than me to know all about 'em? But it was all no use; I couldn't git nothing out of him.

"'If you don't shut up,' he said, quite savage like, 'I'll set Devlin on to you, and you'll have cause to remember it to the last day of your life!'

"Jest as if I haven't got cause to remember it! If I lived a thousand years I couldn't forgit what's happened.

"If I could have got rid of my lodger I shouldn't have thought twice about it; out he'd have gone; but he paid me reg'lar, did Devlin, and always in advance, so that I had no egscuse for giving him notice. And even if I had, I ain't at all sure that I should have had the courage to do it.

"It begun to trouble me more than I can say, that I never heard him come in or go out, and that I never caught the sound of his footsteps on the stairs or in the passage, and that, when he might have been in the Canary Islands for all I knew, I'd turn my head and see him standing at the back of me, without my having the least idea how he got into the room.

"'Here I am, you see, Mrs. Lemon,' he'd say; 'back agin, like a bad penny. You're glad to see me, I'm sure. Say you're glad.'

"And I had to, whether I liked it or not. Then he'd grin and wag his head at me, and sometimes say if he knew where there was another woman like me he'd stick up to her. 'Lord have mercy,' I used to think, 'on the

woman who'd give you a second look unless she was obliged to !'

" I grew to be that shaky and trembly that my life was a perfect misery ; and so was Lemon's. But I used to speak about it, which was a little relief, while poor Lemon would never so much as open his lips. I pitied him a deal more than I did myself. I did say to him once :

" ' Lemon, let's call a broker in when Devlin's not here, and sell the furniture, and run away.'

" ' You talk like a fool,' said Lemon. ' If we was to hide ourselves in the bowels of the earth he'd ferret us out.'

" Then Lemon said one night that Devlin was going to paint our portraits.

" ' He sha'n't paint mine,' I cried, ' not if he orfered to frame it in dymens !'

" The words was no sooner out of my lips than I turned almost to a jelly at hearing Devlin's voice at the back of me, saying,

" ' Nonsense, nonsense, Mrs. Lemon ! Surely it ain't me you're speaking of ? Don't they paint all the Court beauties, and ain't you as good as the best of them ? Your face is like milk and roses, and I'm the artist that's going to do justice to it. You can't refuse me ; you won't have the heart to refuse me.'

" Which I hadn't, with him so close to me. He seemed to take the backbone out of me ; I used to feel quite limp when he took me up like that. He *did* paint my picture, and there it is, stuck on the wall ; and though it's come over me a hundred times to drag it down and burn it, it's more than I dare do for fear of something dreadful happening.

" I can't describe what I went through while that picture was being painted. There was I, setting like a statue in the position that Devlin placed me ; and there was Lemon, leaning for'ard, with his hands clarsping the arms of his chair, and his eyes glaring like a ghost's ; and there was Devlin, waving his brush and painting me.

making all sorts of strange remarks, and singing all sorts of songs in all sorts of languages. He could do that, sir ; I don't believe there's a language in the world that he can't speak, and I don't believe there's anything in the world, or out of it, for that matter, that he doesn't know. *Now, where did he get it all from ?*

"I used to wonder about his age. It was a regular puzzler. Sometimes he looked quite young, and sometimes he looked as old as Methusalem. I plucked up courage once to ask him.

"'What do you say to twenty ?' he answered. 'Or if that won't do, what do you say to eighty, or a couple of hundred ?'

"When my portrait was finished he pretended to go into egstacies over it, and said that it really ought to be eghibited.

"'Mind you keep it as a airloom,' he said. 'You've no notion what it's worth.'

"Then he took Lemon's picture, and it was a comfort to me that he painted my husband up-stairs. Every night for a fortnight Lemon went up to Devlin's room, and set there for two or three hours, and then he'd slide into this room looking as if he'd jest come out of his corfin. It give me such a shock when I first saw the picture that I threw my apern over my head.

"'Ah,' said Devlin with a grin, pulling my apern away, 'I thought you'd be overcome when you set eyes on it. It's a rare piece of work, ain't it ? Why, it almost speaks !'

"It was as like Lemon as like could be—I couldn't deny that ; but there was the sly, wicked look which you've noticed in that there stuffed bird and in the stone image on the mantelshelf. Devlin made us a present of them things after he'd painted the portraits, and told me to treasure 'em for his sake, and that whenever I looked at 'em I was to think of him. He said they was worth ever so much money, but that I was never, never to part with 'em.

" ' If you do,' he said, laughing in my face, ' I'll haunt you day and night.'

" So things went on, gitting worser and worser every day, and Lemon got that thin that you could almost blow him away. And now, sir, I'm coming to the most dreadful part of the whole affair, something that has frightened me more than all the rest put together. What I'm going to speak of now is that awful murder in Victoria Park. Don't think I'm making it up out of my head. I ain't clever enough or wicked enough. If I was I should deserve a judgment to fall on me.

" I've told you of Lemon speaking in his sleep—never did he go to bed without saying things in the night that'd send my heart into my mouth. He seemed as if he was haunted by shadders and spirits, and as if there was always something weighing on his soul that he daren't let out when he was awake. When I found it was no good arguing with him I give it up, and I bore with his writhes and groans, without telling him in the morning of the dreadful night I'd passed. But the day before yesterday, sir, things come to a head.

" He went out early with Devlin as usual, and they both come home together a deal later than they was in the habit of doing. I fixed the time in my dairy, sir ; it was half-past eight o'clock. Before that I'd wrote my letter to you and posted it—the letter you got yesterday morning. Little did I dream of what was going to happen after I sent it off.

" I noticed that Lemon was more trembly than ever, and there was that in his eyes which made my heart bleed for him. It wasn't a wandering look, because he was afraid to look behind him ; it was as if he was trying to shut out something horrible. But I didn't say a word to him while Devlin was with us. He didn't remain long.

" ' I'm going to my room,' he said ; ' I've got a lot of writing to do. Bring me up a pot of tea before you go to bed. Lemon and me's been spending a pleasant hour at the Twisted Cow.'

"‘Lemon looks as if he’d been spending a pleasant hour,’ I thought, as I looked at his white face.

“Then Devlin went to his room on the second floor, and I breathed more free.

“The Twisted Cow, sir, is a public which Devlin is fond of. You may be sure he’d pick out a house with a outlandish name.

“‘O, Lemon, Lemon,’ I said, ‘you look like a ghost!’

“‘Hush!’ he said, with his hand to his ear; he was afraid Devlin might be listening. ‘Don’t speak to me, Fanny; I want to be quiet, very quiet. How horrible, how horrible!’

“‘What’s horrible, Lemon?’ I asked, putting my arms round his neck.

“He pushed me away and asked what I meant.

“‘You said “How horrible, how horrible!” jest now, Lemon.’

“To my surprise, he answered ‘I didn’t. You must have fancied it. Let me be quiet.’

“I didn’t dispute with him, and we set here in the parlour for more than an hour without saying a word to each other. Lemon hadn’t been drinking, sir; he was as sober as I am this minute.

“‘I think I’ll go to bed, Fanny,’ he said.

“The tears come into my eyes, he spoke so soft.

“‘Shall I go and git your supper-beer, Lemon?’ I asked.

“‘No,’ he said, ketching hold of me. ‘I won’t be left alone in the house with that—that devil up-stairs! I don’t want no supper-beer.’

“It was the first time he’d ever spoke of Devlin in that way, and I knew that something out of the common must have happened. Perhaps they’d quarrelled. O, how I hoped they had! It might put a end to their partnership, and there would be a chance of peace and happiness once more.

“‘I won’t leave you, Lemon,’ I said. ‘I’ll take that

wretch his tea, and I hope it'll choke him, and then I'll come to bed too. Shall I make you some gruel, Lemon, or anything else you fancy?"

"'No,' he answered. 'I don't want nothing—only to sleep, to sleep!'

"I made the tea for Devlin, and it's a mercy I didn't have any poison in the house, because I might have been tempted to put it in the pot—though perhaps that wouldn't have hurt him. I knocked at his door, and he said as pleasant as pleasant can be, 'Come in, Mrs. Lemon. What a treasure you are! How happy Lemon ought to be with sech a wife!'

"But I didn't stop to talk to him. I put the tea on the table and went down to Lemon. He was already in bed, and his head was covered with the bedclothes.

"'I'll jest run down,' I whispered, 'and put up the chain on the street-door. I won't be a minute, Lemon.'

"I was back in less than that, and I went to bed. Lemon never moved. I spoke to him, but he didn't answer me; and after a little while I went to sleep.

"I woke up as the clock struck twelve all in a prespiration. Lemon was talking in his sleep, and this is what he said:

"'Victoria Park. Eighteen years old. Golden hair. With a bunch of daisies in her belt. A bunch of white daisies, with blood on 'em! With blood on 'em! With blood on 'em! O Lord, have mercy on her! Near the water. Lord, have mercy on her! Lord, have mercy on her!'

"And then, sir, he give a scream that curdled right through me, and cried, 'Don't let him—don't let him! Save her—save her!'

"How would *you* feel, sir, if you heard some one laying by your side saying sech things in the dead of night?

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH FANNY NARRATES HOW HER HUSBAND HAD A FIT,
AND WHAT THE DOCTOR THOUGHT OF IT.

"NOTHING more took place before we got up in the morning. Lemon torse about as usual, and kept groaning and talking to hisself, but, excep what I've told you, I couldn't make head or tail of his mumblings. Devlin come down to breakfast, and said, as gay as gay can be,

"'I've had a lovely night.'

"'Have you?' said I. I wouldn't have spoke if I could have helped it, but he's got a way of forcing the words out of you.

"'Yes,' he answered, 'a most lovely night. I've slep the sleep of the just.' What he meant by it I don't know, but it's what he said. 'You look tired, Mrs. Lemon.'

"He grinned in my face, sir, as he made the remark, and my blood begun to boil.

"'I've got enough to make me look tired,' I said. 'Lemon hasn't had a decent night's rest for months.'

"'You don't say so! But why not, why not?' asked Devlin, pitching into the ham and eggs.

"'You can answer that better than I can,' I said, jumping from the table; 'You; yes, you!'

"'Fanny!' cried Lemon.

"'I don't care,' I said, feeling reckless; I think it must have been because I was sure you'd come to my help, sir. 'I don't care. Things aren't as they should be, and it stands to reason they can't go on like this much longer.'

"'O,' said Devlin, helping hisself to the last rasher. 'It stands to reason, does it?'

"'Yes, it does,' I answered. 'I'm Lemon's wife, and if he can't take care of hisself it's my duty to do it for him.'

"'Can't you take care of yourself?' asked Devlin of my poor husband. 'That's sad, very sad!'

" 'I can, I can,' cried Lemon. ' Fanny don't know what she's talking about.'

" 'I thought as much,' said Devlin. ' Nerves unstrung. She wants bracing up. I must prescribe for her.'

" 'Not if I know it,' I said. ' I've had enough of you and your prescribing to last me a lifetime. Don't look at me like that, or you'll drive me mad !'

" 'Was there ever sech an unreasonable woman ?' said Devlin, and he come and laid his hand upon me. 'Jest see how she's shaking, Lemon. She's low, very low ; I really must prescribe for her. Leave her to me. I'll see that no harm comes to her.'

" What with his great staring eyes piercing me through and through, and his hand patting my shoulder, and his mocking voice, and the grin on his face, all my courage melted clean away, and I burst out crying and run into the kitchen. There I stayed till I heard the street-door slam, and then I went back to clear the breakfast-things, with a thankful heart that Devlin was gone. If he'd only have left my husband behind him I should have been satisfied, but Lemon was gone too. There was a bottle on the table with something in it, and a label on it in Devlin's writing—

" 'For my dear kind friend, Mrs. Lemon. A tonic for her nerves. A tablespoonful, in water, three times a day.'

" 'A tablespoonful, in water, three times a day,' thinks I to myself. ' Not if I know it.'

" I was going to throw the bottle in the dusthole, but I thought I'd better not, and I put it away on the top shelf of the cupboard, right at the back. After that I went about my work, wondering how it was all going to end, and casting about in my mind whether there was anything I could do to get rid of the creature as was making our lives a misery. But I couldn't think of nothing.

" Lemon was never very fond of politics, but he likes to know what's going on, and we take in a penny weekly

newspaper as gives all the news from one end of the week to the other, and how they do it for the money beats me holler. The boy brings it every Sunday morning, and it ain't once in a year that Lemon buys a daily paper. You'll see presently why I mention it.

"It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and I was setting sewing when I hears the latchkey in the street-door. Now, Saturday is always a late day with Lemon and Devlin ; they don't generally come home till ten or eleven o'clock at night, and I was surprised when I heard the key in the lock. I knew it must be one or the other of 'em, because nobody but them and me has a latchkey. I set and listened, wondering whether it was Lemon and what had brought him home so early, and I made up my mind, if it *was* him, to have a good talk with him, and try and persuade him once more to give up Devlin altogether. 'But why don't he come in ?' thought I. There he was in the street, fumbling about with the key as though there was something wrong with it ; and he stayed there so long that I couldn't stand it no longer, so I goes to the door and opens it myself. The minute it was open Lemon reels past me, behaving hisself as if he was mad or drunk. I picked up the latchkey which he'd dropped, and follered him into the parlour here. What made him ketch hold of me, and moan, and cry, and look round as if he'd brought a ghost in with him, and it was standing at his elber ? And what made him suddenly cover his face with his hands, and after trembling like a aspen leaf, tumble down on the floor in a fit right before my very eyes ? There he laid, sir, twisting and foaming, a sight I pray I may never see agin.

"I knelt down quick and undid his neck-handkercher, and tried to bring him to, but he got worse and worse, and all I could do wasn't a bit of good.

"There was nobody in the house but Lemon and me, and, almost distracted, I run like mad to the chemist's shop at the corner of the second turning to the right, who's

got a son walking the hospitals, and begged him to come with me and see my poor man. He come at once, sir, and there was Lemon still on the floor in his fit. The doctor unclashed Lemon's hands and put something in 'em, and I slipped a cold key down his back because his nose was bleeding.

"' That's a good sign,' said the doctor, as he forced Lemon's jaws apart and put a spoon between his teeth, which Lemon almost bit in two. Then he threw a jug of cold water into Lemon's face, completely sotcerating him, and after that Lemon wasn't so violent; but he didn't recover his senses or open his eyes.

"' Let's git him to bed,' said the doctor.

"' He helped me carry Lemon up-stairs, where we undressed him, and it wasn't before we got him between the sheets that he come to.

"' Feel better?' asked the doctor.

"' But Lemon never spoke.

"' Don't leave him,' said the doctor to me, and he went back to his shop and brought a sleeping draught, which Lemon took, and soon afterwards fell asleep.

"' He won't wake,' said the doctor, 'for twelve hours at least. Is he subject to fits?'

"' No, sir,' I answered; 'this is the first he's ever had. Can you tell me what's the matter with him? He ain't been drinking, has he?'

"' There's no sign of drink,' said the doctor, 'and no smell of it. Does he drink?'

"' Not more than is good for him,' I said. 'I've never seen Lemon the worse for liquor.'

"' What I don't like about him,' the doctor then said, 'was the look in his eyes when he come to his senses—as if he'd had a shock. Has he taken a religious turn?'

"' No, sir.'

"' Is he superstitious at all?'

"' No, sir.'

"' The reason I ask, Mrs. Lemon,' said the doctor.

' is because this don't seem to me a ordinary fit. Is there any madness in your husband's family ?'

" ' I never heard of any,' I answered, ' and I think I should have been sure to know it if there was.'

" ' Very likely,' said the doctor, ' though sometimes they keep it dark. All I can say is, there's something on Mr. Lemon's mind, or he's received a mental shock.'

" With that he went away.

" Lemon by that time was sound as a top. The doctor must have given him a strong dose to overcome him so, and it did my heart good to see him laying so peaceful. But I couldn't help thinking over what the doctor had said of him. There was either something on Lemon's mind or he'd received a mental shock. And that was said without the doctor knowing what I knew, for I'd kep my troubles to myself. I didn't as much as whisper what Lemon had said in his sleep the night before about the young girl in Victoria Park with golden hair and a bunch of white daisies in her belt, covered with blood.

" ' Perhaps Lemon's been reading a story,' I thought, ' with something like that in it, and it's took hold of him.'

" There was nothing to wonder at in that. The penny newspaper we take in always has a story in it that goes on from week to week, and always ending at such a aggravating part that I can hardly wait to git the next number. I fly for it the first thing Sunday morning, before I read anything else. Lemon goes for the police-courts, and takes the story afterwards.

" My mind was running on in that way as I picked up Lemon's clothes, which the doctor and me had tore off him and throwed on the floor; and I don't mind telling you, sir, that I felt in the pockets. First, his trousers. There was nothing in 'em but a few coppers and two-and-six in silver. Then his westcoat. There was nothing in that but his silver watch and a button that had come off. Then his coat. What I found there was his handkercher, his spectacles, and a evening newspaper. I folded his clothes

tidy, and come down-stairs with the paper in my hand. There must be something particular in it, thinks I, as I set down in the parlour here, and opened it in the middle, and smoothed it out. There was, sir.

"The very first words I saw, in big letters, at the top of the column was—'Dreadful and Mysterious Discovery in Victoria Park. Ruthless Murder of a Young Girl. Stabbed to the Heart! A Bunch of Blood-stained Daisies!'

"Can you imagine my feelings, sir?

"I could scarce believe my eyes. But there it was, staring me in the face, like a great bill on the walls printed in red. The ink was black, of course, but as I looked at the awful words they grew larger and larger, and their colour seemed to change to the colour of blood.

CHAPTER XIV.

DEVLIN APPEARS SUDDENLY, AND HOLDS A CONVERSATION WITH FANNY ABOUT THE MURDER.

"Now, sir, while I was looking in a state of daze at the paper, and trying to pluck up courage to read it, I felt a chill down the small of my back, and I knew that our lodger Devlin had crept into the room unbeknown, without me hearing of him.

"'What is this I've been told as I come along?' he said. 'My friend Lemon, your worthy husband, taken ill? It is sad news. Is he very ill? Let me see him.'

"What did I do, sir, but run out of the room, and up-stairs where Lemon was sleeping, and whip out the key from the inside of the door and put it in the outside, and turn the lock. Then I felt I could breathe, and I went down-stairs to Devlin.

"'Why do you lock the poor man in?' he asked.

"'How do you know?' I said, 'that I have locked him in, unless you've been spying me?'

"'How do I know what I know?' he said, laughing.

'Ah, if I eggsplained you might not understand. Perhaps there's little I don't know. I've travelled the world over, Mrs. Lemon, and there's no saying what I've learnt. As for spying, fye, fye, my dear landlady! But you must be satisfied, I suppose, being a woman. Have you ever heard of second sight? It's a wonderful gift. Perhaps I've got it; perhaps I can see with my eyes shut. Sech things are. But this is trifling. Poor Lemon! I am really concerned for him. You musn't keep me away from him. I'm a doctor, and can do him a power of good.'

"'Not,' I said, and where I got the courage from in the state I was in, goodness only knows, 'while there's breath in my body shall you doctor my husband. Mischief enough you've done; you don't do no more.'

"'Mischief, you foolish woman!' he said. 'What mischief? Have you took leave of your senses?' But I didn't answer him. 'Ah, well,' he said, shrugging his shoulders, 'let it be as you wish with my poor friend Lemon. I yield always to a lady. What is this?' And he took up the newspaper. 'You've been reading, I see, the particulars of this sad case. It is more than sad; it is frightful.'

. "I haven't read it," I said.

"'But you was going to?'

"'I won't bemean myself by denying it,' I said. 'Yes, I was going to, when you come into the room unbeknown and unbeware.'

"I had it in my mind to say that it was a liberty to come into a room as didn't belong to him without first knocking at the door, but his black eyes was fixed on me and his moustache was curling up to his nose, and I didn't dare to.

"'When I come into the room,' he said, 'unbeknown and unbeware, as you eggspress it, you had no ears for anything. You was staring at the paper, and your eyes was wild. What for? Is it a murder that frightens you? Foolish, stupid, because murders are so common. How many people go to bed at night and never rise from it agin,

because of what happens while they sleep ! This murder is strange in a sort of way, but not clever—no, not clever. A young girl, eighteen years of age, beautiful, very beautiful, with hair of gold and eyes of blue, receives a letter. From her lover ? Who shall say ? That is yet to be discovered in the future. “Meet me,” the letter says, “in Victoria Park, at the old spot”—which proves, my dear landlady, that they have met before in the same place—“at eleven o’clock to-night.” An imprudent hour for a girl so young ; but, then, what will not love dare ? When you and Lemon was a-courtin didn’t you meet him whenever he asked you at all sorts of out-of-the-way places ? It is what lovers do, without asking why. “And wear,” the letter goes on, “in your belt a bunch of white daisies, so that I may know it is you.” Now, why that ? It is the request of a bungler. If the letter was wrote by her lover—and there is at present no reason to suppose otherwise—he would recognise his sweetheart without a bunch of white daisies in her belt. What, then, is the explanation ? That, also, is in the future to be discovered. Let us imagine something. Say that between the young girl with the hair of gold and the eyes of blue and the man that writes the letter there is a secret, the discovery of which will be bad for him. Pardon, you wish to ask something ?

“ ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘about the letter. How do you know it was wrote ?’

“ ‘Did I say I know ?’ he answered, with his slyest, wickedest look. ‘Ain’t we imagining, simply imagining ? Being in the dark, we must find some point to commence at, and nothing can be more natural than a letter.’

“ ‘Was it found in the young lady’s pocket ?’ I asked.

“ ‘Nothing was found,’ he answered, ‘in the young lady’s pocket.’

“ ‘Then it ain’t possible,’ I said, ‘that the letter could have been wrote.’

“ ‘Sweet innocence !’ said Devlin, and with all these

dreadful goings on, sir, that was making me tremble in my shoes, he had the impudence to chuck me under the chin—and Lemon up-stairs in the state he was! ‘What could be easier than to empty a young lady’s pockets when she’s laying dead before you. A job any fool could do. But the letter may be found.’

“‘ And the murderer, too,’ I said, with a shudder, ‘and hanged, I hope!’

“‘ I share your hope,’ he said, with one of his strange laughs, ‘ by the neck till he is dead. The more the merrier. To continue our imaginings. Between the young lady and her lover, as I said, there’s a secret as would be bad for him if it was made public—as might, indeed, be the ruin of him. This secret may be revealed in the correspondence as passed between them. The chances are that those letters are not destroyed. Men are so indiscreet! Why, they often forgot there’s a to-morrer. The young lady is described as being beautiful. More’s the pity. Beauty’s a snare. If ever I marry—which ain’t likely, Mrs. Lemon—I’ll marry a fright. Beautiful as the young lady is, her lover wishes to git rid of her. Perhaps he’s tired of her; perhaps he’s got another fancy; perhaps he’s seen her twin sister, and is smit with her. There’s any number of perhapses to fit the case. But the poor girl, having been brought to shame——’

“‘ Is that in the paper?’ I asked, interrupting him.

“‘ No,’ he answered, ‘ but it may be. It is always so with those girls; there’s hardly a pin to choose between ‘em. Naturally, she won’t consent to let him get rid of her—won’t consent to release him—won’t consent to let him go free. They quarrel, and make it up. They quarrel agin, and make it up agin. Days, weeks go by, till yesterday comes, and she is to meet him at night. She’s got a mother, she’s got a father; they set together, and she goes to bed early. She’s got a headache, she says, and so, “Good-night, mother; good-night, father;” a kiss for each of ‘em; and there’s a end of kisses and good-nights.

The last page of her little book of life is reached. There's a lot in that scene to make a body think—it's full of pictures of the past. Think of all the days of childhood wasted ; think of all the love, laughter, hopes, joys—wasted ; flowers, ribbons, fancies, dreams—wasted ; all that good men say is sweetest in life, and that's played its part for so many, many years—all wasted. Better to have been wicked at once, better to have been sinful and deceitful all through—think you not so ? " Good-night, mother ; good-night, father," and so—to bed ? No. To go up to her little room and lock the door, to dress herself in her best clothes, to make herself still more beautiful—for that, you see, may melt her lover's heart—to put the bunch of white daisies in her belt, to wait till the house is quiet—so quiet, so quiet !—and then to steal out softly, softly ! She stops at mother's door and listens. Not a sound. Mother and father sleep in peace. Remembrances of the past come to her in the dark, and she cries a little, very quietly. Then she departs. It is done. From that home she is gone for ever, and she is walking to her grave ! The park is still and quiet at that hour of the night ; except for a few hungry wretches who prowl or sleep, the girl and the man have it all to themselves. First—love passages. Twelve o'clock. They stop and listen to the tolling of the bell—they all do that. Some smile and sing at the chimes, some shiver and groan. Next—arguments, entreaties to be released. He will be so good to her, O, so good, if she will only release him ! One o'clock. Next—more love-making and coaxing, then threats, passionate reproaches, defiance. Ah, it has come to that—the end is near ! Two o'clock. He stabs her, quick and sudden, to the heart ? Hark ! do you hear the wild scream ? Her body is dead, and her soul—? But that and other mysteries remain to be unravelled—which may be—Never !'

CHAPTER XV.

FANNY DESCRIBES HOW SHE MADE UP HER MIND WHAT TO DO WITH LEMON.

"DEVLIN put down the newspaper, and waited for me to speak. I think, sir, I've told you eggsactly what he said, and as fur as possible in his own words. They are so printed on my mind that I couldn't forgit 'em if I tried ever so hard. As he described what had took place it was as if he was painting pictures, and he made me see 'em. I saw the poor girl's home ; I saw her setting with her father and mother in jest sech a little room as this—for they are only humble people, sir ; I saw her kiss 'em good-night ; I saw her in her bedroom a-doing herself up before the looking-glass ; I saw her put the bunch of white daisies in her belt ; I saw her steal out of the house to the park ; I saw the man and her walking about among the trees, and sometimes setting down to talk ; I heard a scream—another!—another!—and I covered my eyes with my hands to shut it all out. I was so overcome that I hadn't strength to wrench myself away from Devlin, who was smoothing my hair with his hands. But presently I managed to scream :

"'Don't touch me! Don't touch me, you—you—'

"'You what?' asked Devlin in his false voice, moving a little away from my chair.

"'My scream, and him speaking agin, brought me to myself.

"'Never mind, never mind,' I said. 'If you know what I'm thinking about, it's no use my telling you.'

"'I do know,' he said. 'Why, it's wrote on your face. And I know, too, that you want to ask me some questions. Fire away.'

"'Mr. Devlin, I said, upon that, 'you slep at home last night, didn't you?'

"'Certainly, I did,' he answered. 'Don't you remember Lemon and me coming in together?'

" 'Yes,' I said, 'I remember.'

" 'Don't you remember,' he said, 'that you brought me up a cup of tea before you went to bed, and that I told you I had a lot of writing to do, and that I said what a treasure you was, and how happy Lemon ought to be with sech a wife?'

" 'Yes,' I said, 'I remember.' I couldn't say nothing else, it was the truth.

" 'Inspired by the eggsellent tea you make,' he went on, 'I stopped up late and did my writing. If I mistake not, you put the chain on the street-door before you went to bed.'

" 'Yes, I did.'

" 'And when you went down this morning the chain was still up?'

" 'Yes, it was.'

" 'And I breakfasted with you and Lemon?'

" 'Yes, you did.'

" 'And I presume you made my bed some time during the day?'

" 'Of course I did.'

" 'Did it look as if it had been sleep in?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'So that you see, my dear landlady,' he said, grinning at me, 'that it wasn't possible for me to have murdered the girl.'

" 'Who said you did it?' I asked, starting back, for he had come close to me, and I thought he was going to touch me ag'in.

" 'You didn't say so,' he said, 'but you thought so. It was wrote in your face, as I told you a minute ago. It is women like you who would put a man's life in danger, and think no more of it than snuffing a candle.'

" He didn't remain with me much longer, but went up to his room. He was right in what he said he saw wrote in my face while he was smoothing my hair; an idea had entered my head that it was him who had killed the poor

girl. I think him bad enough for anything; there's nothing wicked I wouldn't believe of him. But of course it wasn't possible for him to have done it; and I thought with thankfulness it wasn't possible for Lemon to have done it, for he never stirred out of the house that night. It was what Lemon said in his sleep that made me tremble and shiver. Why, sir, he spoke of the murder *before it was done!* It says in the papers that when the poor girl was found she had been dead hours, and the doctor fixes it that she must have been murdered between two and three o'clock in the morning. And two hours and a half before she was murdered Lemon was raving in his sleep and telling all about it! How did he know, sir? how did he know?

"If it had been a ordinary case—if Lemon had only spoke in his sleep about some murder or other, and I'd read the next day that a murder *had* been committed that night, it would have been strange, but nothing so very much out of the way. Our minds sometimes runs on dreadful things, enough to give one the creeps, and we ain't accountable for everything we say when we're asleep. But Lemon said Victoria Park, and it was done in Victoria Park. He said eighteen years, and that was jest her age. He said golden hair, and she *had* golden hair. He said a bunch of white daisies, and she wore a bunch of white daisies. He said blood on 'em, and there *was* blood on 'em. He said stabbed to the heart, and she *was* stabbed to the heart!

"I'll tell you, sir, what come to me, and made me feel almost like a murderer. It was that if I'd really known what was going to happen when I heard Lemon talking in his sleep, I might have saved the life of that poor girl. But how was it possible for me to know? Still, that didn't prevent me feeling like a guilty woman.

"But how much did Lemon know? *Did the wretch who killed the girl tell him beforehand what he was going to do, and was Lemon wicked enough to keep it to hisself?

Was the murderer an acquaintance of Lemon's? If he was, I made up my mind that a hour shouldn't pass after Lemon was awake this morning before I put the police on the wretch's track. Lemon would know his name, and where he lived, perhaps. Whatever was the consequences, I'd do what I could to bring the monster into the dock.

"I was more than sorry that the doctor had give Lemon sech a strong sleeping draught, and I prayed that he would wake up sooner than I expected. I went to the bedroom, but there was Lemon fast asleep, with a face as innocent as a babe unborn. He wasn't dreaming, he wasn't talking; his mind was at rest as well as his body. You know more than I do, sir. Could anybody with something dreadful on his mind have slep' like that? But my mind was made up. The very minute Lemon was sensible, and knew what he was about, to the police-station he should go with me, and make a clean breast of it.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. LEMON WAKES UP.

"I WAS that impatient that I hardly knew what to do. Minutes was like dymens, and there Lemon lay like a log. Couldn't I bring him to his senses somehow or other? I tried. I walked about heavy. I threw down things. I even turned Lemon over, but it had no more effect on him than water on a duck's back. He never give so much as a murmur, and I don't think a earthquake would have roused him. I had to give it up as a bad job, but I felt that it would be a mockery for me to go to bed, because in the state I was in it wasn't likely I could git a wink of sleep. Then I knew, too, that there wouldn't be a minute to lose when Lemon opened his eyes, and that it was my duty to git

everything ready. So I spread out Lemon's clothes in regular order, not forgetting his clean Sunday shirt, and I put on my bonnet and cloak, and set down and waited all through that blessed night, looking at Lemon. I didn't hear a sound in the room up-stairs, so I supposed that Devlin was asleep, and I thought how dreadful it was to have a man like that in the house, a man as spoke of murder as though he enjoyed it. The only sound that come to my ears two or three times in the night was the policeman on his beat outside as he passed through the square, and you may guess, sir, I didn't get any comfort out of that. I had my fancies, but I shook 'em off, though they made me shake and shiver. One of 'em was that all of a sudden, jest as the policeman had passed by, there rung through the square shrieks of 'Murder! murder!' and millions of people seemed to be battering at the street-door and crying that they'd tear Lemon and me to pieces. It didn't seem as if they wanted to hurt Devlin, for there he was, standing and grinning at us and the people, with that aggravating look on his face that makes me burn to fly at him, if I only had the courage. Of course it was all fancy, sir; but how would you like to pass sech a night?

"At nine o'clock this morning, and not a minute before, Lemon woke up. I had a cup of tea ready for him in the bedroom, and a slice of bread and butter. He's gone off his breakfast for a long time past, and one slice of bread and butter is as much as he can git down, if he can do that. Before I took Devlin as a lodger, Lemon used to eat a big breakfast, never less than a couple of rashers, and a couple of boiled eggs on the top of that, and four or five slices of bread and butter cut thick. It is a bad sign when a man begins to say he's got no appetite for breakfast. If his stomach ain't going all to pieces, it's something worse, perhaps.

"'Why, Fanny,' said Lemon, séeing me with my bonnet on, 'have you been out? What's the time?'

"He spoke quite calm and cheerful; the sleeping draught had done him good, and had made him forget.

"'The time's nine o'clock, Lemon,' I answered, 'and I ain't been out.'

"'What's to-day?' he asked.

"'Sunday,' I answered.

"'Sunday!' he exclaimed. 'It's funny. Everything seems mixed. Sunday, is it? But, I say, Fanny, if you ain't been out, what have you got your bonnet on for?'

"'I'm waiting for you,' I said. 'Git up, quick, you must come with me at once.'

"'Come with you at once,' he said, rubbing his eyes, to make sure whether he was awake or asleep; and then he must have seen something in my face, for he looked at me strange, and left off rubbing his eyes, and began to rub his forehead. 'I can't understand it. Has anything gone wrong?'

"'Lemon,' I said, speaking very solemn, and speaking as I felt, 'you know too well what has gone wrong, and I only hope you may be forgiven.'

"I shouldn't have stopped short in the middle if it hadn't been that we heard Devlin moving about in the room up-stairs. I looked up at the ceiling, and so did Lemon, and when I saw his face grow white I knew that mine was growing white as well; and I knew, too, that Lemon was gitting his memory back.

"'Speak low, speak low,' he whispered. 'Devlin mustn't hear a word we say. You hope I may be forgiven! For what? What have I done? O, my head, my head! It feels as if it was going to burst!'

"His face begun to get flushed, and the veins swelled out. I thought to myself, I must be careful with Lemon; I mustn't be too sudden with him, or he'll have another fit. I was going to speak soothing, when he clapped his hand on my mouth and almost stopped my breath.

"'Don't say nothing yet,' he said. 'You must tell me something first that I want to know. I feel so confused

—so confused ! What's been the matter with me ? I don't remember going to bed last night.'

" ' You fell down in a fit, Lemon,' I said, ' and I had to get the doctor to you.'

" ' Yes, yes,' he said eagerly. ' Go on—go on.'

" ' We carried you up-stairs here, the doctor and me, and undressed you and put you to bed ; and when you come out of your fit he give you a sleeping draught.'

" ' It's not that I want to know,' he said. ' What made me go into a fit ? I never had a fit before, as I remember. O Fanny, is it all a dream ?'

" ' Lemon,' I answered, ' you must ask your conscience ; I can't answer you. You come home with a evening paper in your pocket, a-moaning and crying, and you ketches hold of me, and looks round as if a ghost had foller'd you into the room, and then you falls down in your fit.'

" ' And him ?' he said, pointing to the ceiling. ' Him —Devlin ? Was he with me ? Did he see me while I was in the fit ?'

" ' No,' I answered. ' He come home after we'd got you to bed, and said he wanted to see you ; but I wouldn't let him. I whipped up-stairs here, and turned the key, so as he shouldn't git at you.'

" ' You did right, you did right. Was he angry ?'

" ' If he was, he didn't show it. He kep with me a long time, talking about the—the——'

" ' About the what ?' asked Lemon, the perspiration breaking out on him.

" ' About the murder ! Well may you shiver ! It was in the newspaper you brought home with you, and he read it out loud, and talked about it in a way as froze my blood.'

" ' Blood !' groaned Lemon. ' Blood ! O Fanny, Fanny !'

" ' He is my husband, sir, and he was suffering, and I ain't ashamed to say that I took him in my arms, and tried to comfort him.'

"'One word, Lemon,' I said, 'only one word before we go on. You ain't guilty, are you?'

"'Guilty?' he answered, but speaking quite soft; we neither of us raised our voices above a whisper. 'My God, no! How could I be? Wasn't I at home and abed when it was done? O, it's horrible! horrible! and I don't know what to think.'

"'Thank God, you're innocent!' I said, and I was so grateful in my heart that my eyes brimmed over. 'And you didn't have nothing to do with the planning of it? Tell me that.'

"'No, Fanny,' he said. '*Him* up-stairs there—did he sleep at home last night?'

"'Unless there's something going on too awful to think of,' I said, 'he did. I ain't been in bed, Lemon, since home you come yesterday and had your fit. And here in this room I've been setting with you from the time I put the chain on the street-door last night till now. I've only left you once—to take in the milk at seven o'clock this morning, and then the chain was on; it hadn't been touched. No one went out of this house last night by the street-door.'

"'They couldn't have gone out no other way,' said Lemon.

"'I don't see how they could,' I said, though I had my thoughts.

"'And the night before, Fanny,' said Lemon, and now he looked at me as if life and death was in my answer, 'the night it was done, did he sleep at home then?'

"'To the best of my belief he did,' I said. 'You may put me on the rack and tear me with red hot pinchers, and I can't say nothing but the truth. He *did* sleep here the night that awful murder was done in Victoria Park. Drag me to the witness-box and put me in irons, and I can't say nothing else. I saw him go to his room after I'd put up the chain; he called out 'Good night;' and the next morning the chain was up jest as I left it. You can't

put the chain on the street-door from the outside ; it must be done from the in. And now, Lemon, listen to me.'

" ' What do you want ? ' he groaned. ' O, what do you want ? Ain't I bad enough already that you try to make me worse ? '

" ' I must say, Lemon, what is on my mind. '

" ' Won't it keep, Fanny ? ' he asked.

" ' It won't keep,' I answered. ' You know the man as committed the murder, and you'll come with me to the police-station, and put the police on his track. '

" ' Me know the wretch ! ' Lemon cried, his eyes almost starting out of his head. ' Have you gone mad ? '

" ' No, Lemon,' I answered, ' I'm in my sober senses. Whatever happens afterwards, we've got to face the consequences, or we shall wake up in the middle of the night and see that poor girl standing at our bedside pointing her finger at us. It's no use trying to disguise it. I know you know the wretch, and deny it you shan't. '

" ' O,' he said, speaking very slow, as if he was choosing words, ' you know I know him ! '

" ' I do,' I answered.

" ' Perhaps,' he said, with something like a click in his throat, ' you will tell me how that's possible, when it's gospel truth I've never set eyes on him all my born days. '

" ' Lemon,' I said, ' be careful, O, be careful, how you speak of gospel truth ! Remember Ananias ! You may beat about the bush as much as you like, but I'm determined to do what I've made up my mind to, and nothing shall drive me from it. '

" ' Of course,' he said, upon that, and speaking flippant, ' if you've made up your mind to the egstent you speak of, I'd best shut my mouth. I'll keep it shut till you tell me how you know what you say you know. '

" ' Lemon,' I said, ' light you speak, but sech you don't feel. You can't deceive me. When we was first married, you slep the sleep of innocence, and your breathing was that regular as showed you had nothing on your mind

to take exception to. But since that Devlin come into the house, the way you've gone on of a night is simply awful. Jumping about in bed as you've been doing night after night, and screaming and talking in your sleep——'

" 'Talking in my sleep !' he cried, and I saw that I'd scared him. ' You shouldn't have let me ! Call yourself a wife ? You should have stopped me ! '

" 'I couldn't help letting you, and I couldn't have stopped you, Lemon, and I'm not sure whether it would have been right to do it if sech was in my power.'

" 'What have I said, what have I said ?' he asked.

" 'The night before last as ever was,' I said, 'when that dreadful deed was done as was printed in the paper you brought home yesterday, you said, while you was laying asleep on the very bed you're laying on now, words as chilled my blood, and it's a mercy I'm alive to tell it. You spoke of Victoria Park ; you spoke of a beautiful young girl with hair the colour of gold ; you spoke—O, Lemon, Lemon !—you spoke of her being stabbed to the heart ; you spoke of a bunch of white daisies as she wore in her belt, and you said there was blood on 'em——'

" I had to stop myself, sir ; for Lemon had hid his face in the bedclothes, and was shaking like a man with Sam Witus's dance in his marrer. I let him lay till he got over it a bit, and then he uncovered his face ; it was as white as a sheet.

" 'Fanny,' he said—and he was hardly able to get his words out—'there's the Bible on the mantelshelf, there. Bring it to me.'

CHAPTER XVII.

LEMON'S VISION IN THE TWISTED COW.

" I FETCHED the Bible, sir, and he took it in his hand, and swore a most solemn oath, and kissed the book on it, that he didn't know the man, that he didn't know the girl,

and that he had no more to do with the murder than a babe unborn. Never in my life did I see a man in sech a state as he was.

"'But, Lemon,' I said, 'how could you come to speak sech words? How could you come to know all about the murder hours and hours before it was done?'

"'I'll tell you, Fanny,' he said, 'as fur as I know; and if you was to cut me in a thousand pieces I couldn't tell you more.'

"'It ain't to be egspected,' I said.

"'If there's men in the world,' Lemon went on, 'as can look into the future, Devlin's one of 'em. If there's men in the world as can tell you what's going to happen—without having anything to do with it theirselves, mind—Devlin's one of 'em. The things he's told me of people is unbelievable, but as true as true can be. "Did you take particular notice of the gentleman whose hair I've been jest cutting?" he said to me. "No," says I; "why should I?" "He's the great Mr. Danebury that all the world's talking of," says he. "Is he?" says I. "I wonder what brings him to our shop? What a charitable man he is! What a good, good man he is!" "Good ain't the word for him," says Devlin. "He comes to our shop because it's out of the way. All the while I was operating on him he was thinking of a little milliner's girl as he's got an appointment with to-night. 'Pritty little Phœbe!' he was saying to hisself as I was cutting his hair. 'What eyes she's got! Bloo and swimming! What a skin's she's got! like satting, it is so white and smooth! What lips she's got! She's a bit of spring, jest budding. Pritty little Phœbe—pretty little Phœbe!'" "But what was he saying that for?" I asks. "He can't be in love with her. He's a family man, ain't he?" "I should think he was a family man," says Devlin. "He's got the most beautiful wife a man could wish for, and as good as she's beautiful; and he's got half-a-dozen blooming children. But that don't prevent his being in love with pritty little Phœbe,

and he's got an appointment with her to-night ; and, what's more, he's going to keep it." I'm putting a true case to you, Fanny,' says Lemon, 'one of many sech. I fires up at what Devlin says about such a good man—that is, I used to fire up when things first commenced. I don't dispute with him now; I know it's no use, and that he's always right, and me always wrong. But then I did, and I asks him how dare he talk like that of sech a man as Mr. Danebury, as gives money to charities, and talks about being everybody's friend. "O, you don't believe me!" Devlin says. "Well, come with me to-night, and we'll jest see for ourselves." And I go with him, and I see a pritty little girl walking up and down the dark turning at the bottom of the Langham Hotel. Up and down she walks, up and down, up and down. "That must be her," says Devlin. We keep watching a little way off on the other side of the way, where it's darker still than where she's walking and waiting, and presently who should come up to her but the great Mr. Danebury ; and he takes her hand and holds it long, and they stand talking, and he says something to make her laugh, and then he tucks her arm in his, and walks off with her. "What do you think of that?" Devlin asks. "He's going to take her to a meeting of the missionary society." What I think of it makes me melancholy, and makes me ask myself, "Can sech things be?" At another time Devlin says, "I shouldn't wonder if you heard of a big fire to-morrer." "Why do you say that?" I asks. "The man who's jest gone out," Devlin answers, "was thinking of one while I was shampooing him—that's all." And that *was* all ; but sure enough I do read of a big fire to-morrer in a great place of business that's heavily insured, and there's lives lost and dreadful scenes. And then sometimes when Devlin and me is setting together, he gits up all of a sudden and stands over me, and what he does to me I couldn't tell you if you was to burn me alive ; but my senses seems to go, and I either gits fancies, or Devlin puts 'em in my head ; but when I come to there's Devlin set-

ting before me, and he says, "I'll wager," says he, "that I'll tell you what you've been dreaming of." "Have I been asleep?" I asks. "Sound," he answers, "and talking in your sleep." And he tells me something dreadful that I've said about something that's going to happen; and before the week's out it *does* happen, and I read of it in the papers. For a long time this has been going on till I've got in that state that I'd as soon die as live. If you don't understand what I'm trying to eggsplain, Fanny,' said my poor Lemon, 'it ain't my fault; it's as dark to me as it is to you. Sometimes I says to Devlin, "I'll go and warn the police." "Do," says Devlin, "and be took up as a accomplice, and be follerred about all your life like a thief or a murderer. Go and tell, and git yourself hanged or clapped in a madhouse." Of course, I see the sense of that, and I keep my mouth shut, but I get miserabler and miserabler. So the day before yesterday—that's Friday, Fanny—Devlin and me is sitting in the private room of the Twisted Cow, when he asks me whether I've ever been to Victoria Park, and I answers "Lots of times." Now Fanny,' said Lemon, breaking off in his awful confession, 'if you ain't prepared to believe what's coming, I'll say no more. It'll sound unbelievable, but I can't help that. Things has happened without me having anything to do with 'em, and I'd need to be a sperrit instead of a man to account for 'em.'

"'Lemon,' I said, 'I'm prepared to believe everything, only don't keep nothing from me.'

"'I won't,' said Lemon; 'I'll tell you as near and as straight as I can what happened after Devlin asked me whether I'd ever been to Victoria Park. His eyes was fixed upon me that strange that I felt my senses slipping away from me; it wasn't that things went round so much as they seemed to fade away and become nothing at all. Was I setting in the private room of the Twisted Cow? I don't know. Was it day or night? I don't know. I wouldn't swear to it, though the moon was shining through the trees. The trees where? Why, in Victoria Park,

and no place else. And there was a man and a woman—a young beautiful woman, with golden hair, and a bunch of white daisies in her belt—talking together. How do I know that she's young and beautiful when I didn't see her face? That's one of the things I'm unable to answer. And I don't see the man's face, either. Whether a minute passed or a hour, before I heard a shriek, I can't say, and perhaps it ain't material. And upon the shriek, there, near the water, laid the young girl, dead, with the bunch of white daisies in her belt, stained with blood. Then, everything disappeared, and, trembling and shaking to that degree that I felt as if I must fall to pieces, I looked up and round, and found myself in the private room of the Twisted Cow, with Devlin setting opposite me. "Dreaming agin, Lemon?" he says, with a grin. But I don't answer him; my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. That's all I know, Fanny. Whether I saw what I've told you, or was told it, or only fancied it, is beyond me. What I've said is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God!"

"That's what I heard from Lemon's own lips this morning, sir, up-stairs, abed, where he is laying now, with the door locked on him.

"I took off my hat and cloak, and Lemon burst out crying.

"'You believe me, Fanny!' he cried.

"'I believe every word you said,' I answered. 'It's no use going to the police-station this morning. A good friend of our'n is coming to see me to-day, and we'll wait and do what he advises us. Only you must promise to see him.' And I told him who you was, and why I wrote to you on Friday before poor Lizzie Melladew met her death.

"'I promise,' said Lemon, 'and you've done right, Fanny.'

"And now, sir, I've told you everything as I said I would, and you know as much as I do about this dreadful business."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FANNY'S STORY BEING CONCLUDED, I PAY A VISIT TO MR. LEMON, AND RESOLVE TO INTERVIEW DEVLIN THE BARBER.

THIS was the story which Fanny related to me, and to which I listened in wonder and amazement. As she related it I wondered at times whether it was possible that what she said could be true, but I saw no reason to question her veracity; and there certainly could be no doubt of her sincerity. I had to some extent conquered the fascination which Lemon's portrait on the wall, the stuffed bird in its glass case, and the evil-looking monster on the mantelshelf had exercised over me, but even now I could scarcely gaze upon them without a shudder. Fanny did not relate her story straight off, without a break, and I need hardly say that it was much longer than is here transcribed. But I have omitted no important point; everything pertinent to the tragedy of the murder of Mr. Melladew's daughter is faithfully set down. When she finished it was quite dark; at my request she had not lighted lamp or candle.

There were breaks, as I have said. Twice she left off, and went up-stairs to see Lemon, and give him something to eat and drink.

"He knows you're here, sir," she said, when she returned on the first occasion.

"Is he impatient to see me?" I asked.

"No, sir," she replied. "All he seems to want is to be left alone."

"But he will see me?"

"O, yes, sir! He'll keep his promise."

Once there was an interval of more than half-an-hour, during which I ate some cold meat and bread she brought me, and drank a pint bottle of stout.

There was another occasion when she suddenly paused, with her finger at her lips.

"What are you stopping for, Fanny?" I asked.

" Speak low, sir," she said. " Devlin!"

" Where?" I said, much startled.

" He has just opened the street-door, sir."

" I heard nothing, Fanny."

- " No, sir, you wouldn't. You don't know his ways as I do. Don't speak for a minute or two, sir."

I waited, and strained my ears, but no footfall reached my ears. Presently Fanny said :

" He's gone up to his room. He waited outside Lemon's door, and tried it, I think. Have you any notion what you are going to do about him, sir?"

" My ideas are not yet formed, but I intend to see and speak with him."

" You do, sir?"

" I do, Fanny. A special providence has directed my steps here to-day. I knew the poor girl who has been murdered."

" Sir!"

" Her family and mine have been friends for years. The interest I take in the discovery of the murderer is no common interest, and I intend to bring him to justice."

" How, sir?" exclaimed Fanny, greatly excited.

" Through Mr. Devlin. The way will suggest itself. You have not heard him leave the house since he entered a little while since?"

" No, sir. He is in his room now."

" If," I said, " when I am with your husband—and I intend to remain with him but a short time—Devlin comes down-stairs, let me know immediately. Keep watch for him."

" I will, sir. O, how thankful I am that you're here—how thankful, how thankful!"

" I hope we shall all have reason to be thankful. And now, Fanny, I will go up to your husband."

" I'll go in first, and prepare him, sir."

" Let us have lights in the house. Don't leave Mr. Lemon in the dark. Put a candle in the passage also."

She followed my instructions, and then we went to her husband's bedroom. I waited outside while she "prepared" him. It did not take long to do so, and she came to the door and beckoned to me. I entered the room, and desired her to leave us alone.

"But don't lock us in," I added.

"No, sir," she said.. "Lemon's safe now you're with him."

With that she retired, first smoothing the bedclothes and the pillow with a kind of pitying, soothing motion as though Lemon was about to undergo an operation.

I moved the candle so that its light fell upon Lemon's face. A scared, frightened face it was that turned towards me, the face of a man who had received a deadly shock.

It is unnecessary to say more than a few words about what passed between Mr. Lemon and myself. My purpose was to obtain from him confirmation of the strange mysterious story which Fanny had related. In this purpose I succeeded ; it was correct in every particular. What I elicited from Lemon was elicited in the form of questions which I put to him and which he answered, sometimes readily, sometimes reluctantly. Had time not been so precious, my curiosity would have impelled me to go into matters respecting Devlin other than the murder of Lizzie Melladew, but I felt there was not a minute to waste ; and at the termination of my interview with Lemon I went into the passage, where I found Fanny waiting for me. Whispering to her not to remain there, in order that Devlin might not be too strongly prejudiced against me—supposing him to be on the watch as well as ourselves—and receiving from her instructions as to the position of his room, I mounted the stairs with a firm, loud tread, and stood in the dark at the door which was to conduct me to the presence of the mysterious being.

CHAPTER XIX.

FACE TO FACE WITH DEVLIN, I DEMAND AN EXPLANATION OF HIM.

I RAPPED with my knuckles, and a voice which could have been none other than the voice of Devlin immediately responded, calling to me to enter. The next moment I stood face to face with the strange creature, concerning whom my curiosity was raised to the highest pitch. He was sitting in a chair upon my entrance, and he did not rise from it; therefore I looked down upon him and he looked up at me. As my eyes rested on his face, I saw in it the inspiration of the evil expression in the faces of Mr. Lemon's portrait, the stone monster, and the bird's beak, which had made so profound an impression upon me in the parlour on the ground-floor.

"You have been in the house some time," said Devlin.

"I have," I answered.

"And have had a long, a very long, conversation with my worthy landlady," he observed.

"Yes," I said.

"About me," he said, not in the form of a question but as a statement of fact.

"Partly about you."

"And about poor Lemon?"

"Yes, about him as well."

"Sit down," said Devlin, "I expected you."

There was only one other chair in the room besides the one he occupied, and I accepted his invitation, and drew it up to the table. And there we sat gazing at each other for what appeared to me a long time in silence.

The room was very poorly furnished. There were the two chairs, a small deal table, and a single iron bedstead in the corner. Off the room was a kind of closet, in which I supposed were a washstand and fittings. There was only one other article in view in addition to those I have mentioned,

and that was a desk at which Devlin was writing.* He did not put away his papers, and I was enabled to observe, without undue prying, that his writing was very fine and very close.

How shall I describe him? A casual observation of his face and figure would not suffice for the detection of anything uncanny about him, but it must be remembered that I was abnormally excited, and most strangely interested in him. He was tall and dark, his face was long and spare; his forehead was low; his eyes were black, with an extraordinary brilliancy in them; his mouth was large, and his lips thin. He wore a moustache, but no beard. In the order and importance of the impressions they produced upon me I should place first, his black eyes with their extraordinary brilliancy, and next, his hands, which were unusually small and white. They were the hands of a lady of gentle culture rather than those of a man in the class of life to which Devlin appeared to belong. Not alone was his social standing presumably fixed by the fact of his living in a room so poorly furnished at the top of a house so common as Mr. Lemon's, but his clothes were a special indication. They were shabby and worn; black frock-coat, black trousers and waistcoat, narrow black tie. Not a vestige of colour about them, and no sign of jewellery of any kind.

"Well?" he said.

I started. I had been so absorbed in my observance of him that I, who should have been the first to plunge into the conversation, had remained silent for a time so unreasonably long that the man upon whom I had intruded might have justly taken offence.

"I beg your pardon," I said; "did you not remark that you expected me?"

* I have this desk, with its contents, now in my possession. The extraordinary revelations made therein (which I may mention have no connection with the present story) will one day be made public.—B. L. F.

"Yes."

"May I inquire upon what grounds your expectation was based?"

He smiled; and here I observed, in the quality of this smile, a characteristic of which Mrs. Lemon had given me no indication. Devlin was evidently gifted with a touch of humour.

"I reason by analogy," he said. "My landlady has very few visitors. You are here for the first time, with an object. You remain closeted with her for hours. She probably sent for you. During the long interview down-stairs you have been told a great deal about me. You hear me open the street-door, and you know I am in the house. My landlady has a trouble on her mind, and mixes me up with it. You have been made acquainted with this trouble and with my supposed connection with it. Your curiosity has been aroused, and you determine to seek an interview with me before you take your leave of her. You come up uninvited, and here you are, as I expected. Am I logical?"

"Quite logical."

"In a common-sense view of commonplace matters—and everything in the world is commonplace—lies the ripest wisdom. Follow my example. Exercise your common sense."

But I did not immediately speak. Devlin's words were so different from what I had expected that I was for a moment at a loss. The prospect of my being able to bring the murderer of Lizzie Melladew to justice and of earning a thousand pounds did not appear so bright.

"I will assist you," he resumed; "I will endeavour to set you at your ease with me. Your scrutiny of me has been very searching; I ought to feel flattered. What anticipations of my appearance you may have entertained before you entered the room is your affair, not mine. How far they are realised is your affair, not mine. But allow me to assure you, my dear sir," and here he rose to his

full height, and made me a half-humorous, half-mocking bow, "that I am a very ordinary person."

"That cannot be," I said, "after what I have heard."

"It is the destiny," he said, resuming his seat, "of greater personages than myself to be ranked much higher than they deserve. Proceed."

"I am here to speak to you about this murder," I said, plunging boldly into the subject.

"Ah, about a murder! But there are so many."

"You know to which one I refer. The murder of a young girl in Victoria Park, which took place the night before last."

"I have heard and read of it," said Devlin.

"You know also," I continued, "that the tragedy has produced in Mr. Lemon a condition of mind and body which may lead to dangerous results, probably to a despairing death."

"All men must die," he said cynically.

I was now thoroughly aroused. "I have come to you for an explanation," I said, "and it must be a satisfactory one."

"You speak like an inquisitor," said Devlin, with a quiet smile, and I seemed to detect in his altered manner a desire to irritate me and to drive me into an excess of passion. For this reason I kept myself cool, and simply said,

"I am resolved."

"Good. Keep resolved."

"I shall do so. By some devilish and mysterious means you were aware, before the poor girl left her home on Friday night, that her doom was sealed. You could have prevented it, and you did not raise a hand to save her. This knowledge I have gained from Mr. Lemon, to whom, through you, the impending tragedy was known."

"Then why did *he* not prevent it?"

"It was not in his power. He was not acquainted with the names of the murderer and his victim."

"Was I?"

"You must have been. I do not pretend to an understanding of the extraordinary power you exercise, but I am convinced that, in connection with you, there is a mystery which should be brought to light, and if I can be the agent to unmask you I am ready for the work. With all the earnestness of my soul, I swear it."

A low laugh escaped Devlin's lips. "Were a commissioner of lunacy here," he said, "you would be in peril. This young girl you speak of, is she in any way connected with you?"

"She was my friend; I knew her from childhood; she has sat at my table with her sister and parents, and I and mine have sat at theirs. Her family are plunged into the lowest depths of despair by the cruel, remorseless blow which has fallen upon them."

"And you have taken upon yourself the task of an avenger. It is chivalrous, but is it entirely unselfish? I am always suspicious of mere words; there is ever behind them a secret motive, hidden by a dark curtain. I speak in metaphor, but you will seize my meaning, for you are a man of nerve and intelligence, utterly unlike our friend in the room below, whose nature is servile and abject, and who is not, as you are, given to heroics. Calm yourself. I am ready to discuss this matter with you, but in your present condition I should have the advantage of you. You are heated; I am cool and collected. You have some self-interest at heart; I have none. Your words are so wild that any person but myself hearing them would take you for a madman. For your own sake—not for mine, for the affair does not concern me—I advise moderation of language. I suppose you will scarcely believe that the man upon whom you have unceremoniously intruded, and against whom you launch accusations, the very extravagance of which renders them unworthy of serious consideration—you will scarcely believe that this man is simply a poor barber who has not a second coat to his back, nor a second pair of

shoes to his feet. But it is a fact—a proof of the injustice of the world, ever blind to merit. For I am not only a barber, sir, I am a capable workman, as I will convince you. Pray do not move; a cooling essence and a brush skilfully used effect wonders on an over-heated head."

It was not in my power to resist him. He had taken his place behind my chair, and before he had finished speaking had sprinkled a liquid over my head which was so overpoweringly refreshing that I insensibly yielded to its influence. With brush and comb he arranged my hair, his small white hands occasionally touching my forehead gently and persuasively. When I thought afterwards of this strange incident I called to mind that, for the two or three minutes during which he was engaged in the exercise of his art, I was in a kind of quiet dream, in which all the agitating occurrences of the previous day in connection with the murder of Lizzie Melladew were mentally repeated in proper sequence, closing with Mr. Portland's offer of a thousand pounds for the discovery of the murderer. It was, as it were, a kind of panorama which passed before me of all that occurred between morning and night. I looked up, inexpressibly refreshed, and with my mind bright and clear. Devlin stood before me, smiling.

"Confess, sir," he said, in a soft persuasive tone, "that I have returned good for evil. The fever of the brain is abated, or I am a bungler indeed. We will now discuss the matter."

CHAPTER XX.

DEVLIN ASTONISHES ME.

"I REMARKED to you just now," he said, seating himself comfortably in his chair, "that I am always suspicious of mere words, for the reason that there is ever a secret motive behind them. From what you have said I should

be justified in supposing that your desire to discover the mystery in which the death of your poor young friend is involved springs simply from sympathy with her bereaved family. I will not set a trap for you, and pin you to that statement by asking questions which you would answer only in one way. You would argue with yourself probably as to the disingenuousness of those answers, but would finally appease your conscience by deciding that I, a perfect stranger to you and your affairs, cannot possibly have anything to do with the private motives by which you are influenced. Say, for instance, by such a motive as the earning of a reward which we will put down at a thousand pounds."

For the life of me I could not restrain a start of astonishment. It was the exact sum Mr. Portland had offered me. By what dark means had Devlin divined it?

"You need not be discomposed," said Devlin. "The thing is natural enough. You have credited me with so much that it will harm neither of us if you credit me with a little more—say, with a certain faculty for reading men's thoughts. The world knows very little as yet; it has much to learn; and I, in my humble way, may be a master in a new species of spiritual power. Now, I have a profound belief in Fate; what it wills must inevitably be. And, impressed by this article of faith, I, the master, may be willing to become the slave. Fate has led you to this house, and it may be that you are an instrument in discoveries yet to be made. I continue, you observe, to speak occasionally in metaphor. Be as frank with me as I have been with you. No, don't trouble yourself to speak immediately. In the words you were about to utter there is a subterfuge; you have not yet made up your mind to be entirely open with me. You and I meet now for the first time. Before this day I have never known of your existence, nor have you been aware of mine."

"If that be true," I said, interrupting him, "what made you mention the reward of a specific sum?"

"Of a thousand pounds?" he asked, smiling.

"Exactly."

"Do you deny that such a reward has been offered to you?"

"I do not deny it; but by what mysterious means did you come to the knowledge of it?"

"Because it is in your mind, my dear sir," he said.

"That is no answer."

"Is it not? I should have thought it would satisfy you, but you are inclined to be unreasonable. Come, now, I will show you how little I am concealing from you with respect to my knowledge of your movements." He shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked at me from beneath it.

"I do not know your name, nor in what part of London you reside, but certainly you and your wife—no doubt a most estimable lady—were sitting together at breakfast yesterday morning."

He paused, and waited for me to speak. "It is quite true," I said; "but there is nothing unusual in husband and wife partaking of that meal in company."

"Nothing in the least unusual if a man is master of his own time, as you were yesterday morning, for the first time for a long while past. The fact is, you had lost a situation in which you have been employed for years."

I sat spellbound. Devlin continued :

"The breakfast-things are on the table, and you and your lady are discussing ways and means. You are not rich, and you look forward with some fear to the future. Times are hard, and situations are not easy to obtain. In the midst of your consultation a man rushes into the room. He is a middle-aged man. Shall I describe him?"

"If you can," I said, my wonder growing.

He gave me a fairly faithful description of Mr. Melladew, and proceeded :

"A great grief has fallen upon this man. It is only within the last hour that he has discovered that his daughter had been murdered. He remains with you some

time, and then other persons make their appearance, among them newspaper reporters and policemen, all doubtless drawn to your house by this business of the murder. You have also an interview with a young gentleman. The day passes. It is evening, and you are seated with another person. By this person you are offered one thousand pounds if you discover the murderer of the young girl, and another thousand if you find her sister, who has strangely disappeared. I do not wish to deprive you of such credit as belongs to a man who sympathises with a friend in trouble ; but it is certainly a fact that the dim prospect of earning such a handsome sum of money is very strong within you. That is all."

I deliberated awhile in silence, and Devlin did not disturb my musings. All that he had narrated had passed through my mind while he was engaged in dressing my hair. Had he the power of reading thoughts by the mere action of his fingers upon a man's head ? No other solution occurred to me, and had I not been placed in my present position I should instantly have rejected it ; but now I was in the mood for entertaining it, wild and incredible as it appeared. During this interval of silence I made a strong endeavour to calm myself for what was yet to take place between me and Devlin, and I was successful. When I spoke I was more composed.

" You say you do not know where I live. Is it true ? " I asked.

" Quite true," he answered.

" You do not really know my name ? "

" I do not."

" Nor the names of my visitors ? "

" Nor the names of your visitors."

" But you must be aware," I said, " admitting, for the sake of argument, that you are not romancing——"

" Yes," he said, laughing, " admitting that, for the sake of argument."

" You must be aware that the name of the first man

who visited me—he being, as you have declared, the father of the murdered girl—is Melladew."

"I am aware of it, not from actual knowledge, but from what I have read in the newspapers."

"But of the name of the gentleman who, you say, offers the reward of a thousand pounds, you are ignorant."

"Quite ignorant. Now, having replied to your questions frankly, confess that you have forced yourself upon me with a distinct motive, in which I, a stranger to you, am interested."

"My object is to discover the murderer and bring him to justice."

"A very estimable design."

"And also to discover what has become of the murdered girl's sister."

"Exactly. How do you propose to accomplish your object?"

"Through you."

"Indeed! Through me?"

"As surely as we are in the same room together, through you. Receive what I am about to say as the fixed resolve of a man who sees before him a stern duty and will not flinch from it. Having come into association with you, I am determined not to lose sight of you. I put aside any further consideration of a strange and inexplicable mystery in connection with yourself as being utterly and entirely beyond my power to understand."

"My dear sir," said Devlin, with a glance at his shabby clothes, "you flatter me."

"All my energies now are bent to one purpose, which, through you, I shall carry to its certain end. You have made yourself plain to me. I hope up to this point I have made myself plain to you."

"You are the soul of lucidity," said Devlin, "but much remains yet to explain. For the sake of argument we have admitted an element of romance into this very prosaic matter; for it is really prosaic, almost commonplace. Life

is largely made up of tragedies and mysteries, the majority of them petty and contemptible, a few only deserving to be called grand. As a matter of fact, my dear sir, existence, with all its worries, anxieties, hopes, and disappointments, is nothing better than a game of pins and needles. It is the littleness of human nature that magnifies a pin prick into a wound of serious importance. To think that some of these mortals should call themselves philosophers! It is laughable. Do you follow me?"

"Not entirely," I replied, "but I have some small glimmering of your meaning."

"Were your mind," said Devlin, shaking with internal laughter, "quite free from the influence of that thousand pounds, it would be clearer. In the grand Scheme of Nature, so far as mortals comprehend it, the potent screw is human selfishness. These speculations, however, are perhaps foreign to the point. Let us continue our amicable argument until we thoroughly understand each other upon the subject of this murder. You see, my dear sir, I wish to know exactly how I stand; for despite the extraordinary opinion you have formed of me, it is you who have assumed the rôle of Controller of Destinies. I am but a mere instrument in your hands." He measured me with his eyes. "You are well built, and are, I should judge, a powerful man."

"You are contemplating the probability of a physical struggle between us," I said. "Dismiss it; there will be none."

He made me a mocking bow. "My mind is, indeed, relieved. You do not intend violence, then. I am free to leave the house if I wish—at this moment, if I please. Have you taken that contingency into account?"

"I have."

"You will not attempt to detain me by force?"

"No."

"In such an event, how will you act?"

"I shall follow you, and to the first policeman I meet I

shall say, ‘ Arrest that person. He is implicated in the murder of Lizzie Melladew.’ ”

Devlin cast upon me a look of admiration. “ That would be awkward,” he said.

“ Decidedly awkward—for you.”

“ You would be asked to furnish evidence.”

“ Direct evidence it would be, at present, out of my power to supply,” I said ; I was on my mettle ; my mental forces were never clearer, were never more resolutely set upon one object ; “ but there is such a thing as circumstantial evidence. Mr. Lemon and his wife should come forward, and relate all that they know concerning you. You and Mr. Lemon are carrying on a business somewhere ; the place should be searched ; it should be made food for the multitude who are ever on the hunt for the sensational. Your desk on the table here contains writings of yours ; they may throw light upon the investigation. So we should go on, step by step, independent of your assistance, until we get the murderer—who may or may not be an accomplice of yours—into the clutches of the law.”

Towards the end of this speech I had risen and approached the window, which faced the square. Mechanically lifting the blind, I looked out, and saw what arrested my attention. By the railings on the opposite side, with his eyes raised to the window, was the figure of a man. He was standing quite motionless, and, the night being fine, with a panoply of stars in the sky, I presently recognised the figure to be that of George Carton, poor Lizzie Melladew’s distracted lover. At some little distance from him was the figure of another man, whose movements were distinguished by restlessness, and in him I recognised Carton’s guardian, Mr. Kenneth Dowsett.

“ Looking for a policeman ?” inquired Devlin, with a touch of amusement in his voice.

“ No,” I replied, “ but I am pleased to discover that I am not alone, that I have friends outside ready to assist me the moment I call upon them.”

Devlin rose, and joined me at the window.

"Is your sight very keen?" he asked.

"Keen enough to recognise friends," I said.

"Mine is wonderful," said Devlin, "quite catlike; another of my abnormal qualities. I can plainly distinguish the features of the two men upon whom we are gazing. One is young. Who is he?"

"His name," I replied, believing that entire frankness would be more likely to win Devlin to my side, "is George Carton."

"I recognise him; he was in your house yesterday morning. He seems distressed. There is a troubled look in his face."

"He was the murdered girl's lover."

"Ah! And the other, the elder man, casting anxious glances upon the younger—who may he be?"

"His name is Mr. Kenneth Dowsett. He is young Carton's guardian."

"Thank you," said Devlin, returning to his seat at the table. I dropped the blind, and resumed my seat opposite to him, and then I observed a singular smile upon his face, to which I could attach no meaning.

"I presented," he said, "a certain contingency to you, the contingency of my leaving this house, and you have been delightfully explicit as to the course you would pursue. But, my dear sir, crediting myself with a species of occult power, which you appear ready to grant to me, might it not be in my power to vanish, to disappear from your sight the moment the policeman you would summons attempted to lay hands upon me?"

"I must chance that," I said.

"Good. Nothing of the sort will occur, I promise. I cannot carry on my pursuit as a Shadow. The idea of leaving the house did occur to me; I banish it. Well, then, suppose I remain here; suppose I put an end to this discussion; suppose I go to bed. To all your vapourings, suppose I say, 'Go to the devil!' Why on earth do you

stare at me so? It is a common saying, and the awful consequences of such a journey are seldom thought of. I repeat, I say to you, 'Go to the devil!' What, then?"

"I still could summon a policeman," I said; "but even if I postponed that step or you managed to escape from me, I have a talent which, now that it occurs to me, I shall immediately press into my service."

"Enlighten me."

I took from my pocket some letters, and tore from them three blank leaves, upon which I set to work with pencil. My task occupied me ten minutes and more, during which time Devlin, sitting back in his chair, watched me with an expression of intense amusement in his face. When I had finished I handed him one of the blank leaves.

"My portrait!" he exclaimed. "I am an artist myself, as you have seen in Mrs. Lemon's parlour. This picture is the very image of me!"

"There is no mistaking it," I said complacently. "It will insure recognition."

"In what way do you propose to turn it to advantage, in the event of my being contumacious?"

"You have doubtless," I said, "noted the changes that have taken place in the life of civilised cities?"

"Excellent," he said. "My dear sir, you compel my admiration; you are altogether so different a person from the simpleton who lies shaking in his bed on the floor below. You have brain power. My worthy landlord and partner would have as well fulfilled his destiny had he been a mouse. The changes that have taken place! Ah, what changes have I not seen, say, in the course of the last thousand years!" And here he laughed loud and long. "But proceed, my dear sir, proceed. How do these changes affect me in the matter we are now considering?"

"There was a time——"

"Really, like the beginning of a fairy story," he interposed.

"When public opinion was of small weight, whereas now it is the most important factor in social affairs."

"Lucidly put. I listen to you with interest."

"The penny newspaper," I observed sagely, "is a mighty engine."

"You speak with the wisdom of a platitudeinarian."

"It enlists itself in the cause of justice, and frequently plays, to a serviceable end, the part of a detective. You may remember the case of Leroy."

"A poor bungler, a very poor bungler. A small mind, my dear sir, eaten up by self-conceit of the lowest and meanest quality."

"For a long time Leroy evaded justice, but at length he was arrested. A popular newspaper published in its columns a portrait of the wretch——"

"I see," said Devlin, "and you would publish *my* portrait in the newspapers?"

"In every paper that would give it admittance; and few would refuse. Beneath it should be words to the effect that it was the portrait of a man who knew, before its committal, that the murder of the poor girl Lizzie Melladew was planned, and who must, therefore, be implicated in it. The portrait would lead to your arrest, and then Mr. and Mrs. Lemon would come forward with certain facts. Mr. Devlin, I would make London too hot to hold you."

"An expressive phrase. Your plan is more than ordinarily clever; it is ingenious. And London," said Devlin thoughtfully, "is such a place to work in, such a place to live in, such a place to observe in! To be banished from it would be a great misfortune. What other city in the world is so full of devilment and crime; what other city in the world is so full of revelations; what other city in the world is so full of opportunities, so full of contrasts, so full of hypocrisy and frivolity, so full of cold-blooded villainy? The gutters, with their ripening harvests of vice for gaol and gallows; the perfumed gardens, the fevered courts;

the river, with its burden of jewels and beauty, with its burden of woe and despair ; the bridges, with their nightly load of hunger, sin, and shame ; the mansions, with their music, and false smiles, and aching hearts ; the garrets, with their dim lights flickering ; the bells, with their solemn warning ; the busy streets, with their scheming life ; the smug faces, the pinched bellies, the satins, the rags, the social treacheries, the suicides, the secret crimes, the rotting souls ! My dear sir, the prospect of your making such a field too hot to hold even such a poor tatter-demolition as myself overwhelms me. What is the alternative ?"

" That you pledge yourself by all that is holy and sacred to give me your fullest assistance towards the discovery of Lizzie Melladew's murderer."

CHAPTER XXI.

DEVLIN AND I MAKE A COMPACT.

" A SACRED and holy pledge," said Devlin, " from me ? Is it possible that you ask *me* to bind myself to you by a pledge that you deem holy and sacred ?"

" I know of no other way to secure your assistance," I said, feeling the weight of the sneer.

" If you did, you would adopt it ?"

" Assuredly."

" So that, after all, you are to a certain extent in my power."

" As you to a certain extent are in mine."

" A fair retort. Before I point out to you how illogical and inconsistent you are, let me thank you for having converted what promised to be a dull evening into a veritable entertainment. It is a real cause for gratitude in such a house as Lemon's, of whom I have already spoken disparagingly, but of whom I cannot speak disparagingly

enough. My dear sir, that person is devoid of colour, his moral and physical qualities are feeble, his intellect may be said to be washed out. It is the bold, the daring, that recommends itself to me, although I admit that there are curious studies to be found among the meanest of mortals. Now, my dear sir, for your inconsistency and your lack of the logical quality. My worthy landlady has conveyed to you an impression of me which, to describe it truthfully, may be designated unearthly. How much farther it goes I will not inquire. Her small capacity has instilled into what, as a compliment, I will call her mind, a belief that I am not exactly human—in point of fact, that if I am not the Evil One himself, I am at least one of his satellites. Common people are inclined to such extravagances. They believe in apparitions, vampires, and supernatural signs, or, to speak more correctly, in signs which they believe to be supernatural. The most ordinary coincidences—and think, my dear sir, that there are myriads of circumstances, of more or less importance, occurring every twenty-four hours in this motley world, and that it is a mathematical certainty that a certain proportion of these myriads should be coeval and should bear some relation to each other—the most ordinary coincidences, I repeat, are outrageously magnified by their imaginations when, say, sickness or death is concerned. A woman wakes up in the night, and in the darkness hears a ticking—tick, tick, tick! She rises in the morning, and hears that her mother-in-law has died during the night. ‘Bless my soul!’ she exclaims. ‘I knew it, I knew it! Last night I woke up all of a tremble’—(which, she did not, but that is a detail)—‘and heard the death-tick!’ The story, being told to the neighbours, invests this woman, who is proud of having received a supernatural warning, with supreme importance. She becomes for a time a social star. She relates the story again and again, and each time adds something which her imagination supplies, until, in the end, it is settled that her mother-in-law died at the precise moment she woke nn.

that she saw the ghost of that person at her bedside, very ghastly and sulphury, in the moonlight—(it is always moonlight on these occasions)—that the ghost whispered in sepulchral tones, ‘I am dying, good-bye;’ that there was a long wail; and that then she jumped out of bed and screamed, ‘My mother-in-law is dead!’ This is the story after it has grown. What are the facts? The woman has eaten a heavy supper, and she sleeps not so well as usual; she wakes up in the middle of the night. In the kitchen a mouse creeps on to the dresser, after some crumbs of bread and cheese which are in a plate. The ever-watchful cat—I love cats, especially good mousers—jumps upon the dresser, with the intention of making a meal of the mouse. On the dresser, then, at this precise moment, are the plate containing the crumbs of bread and cheese, the mouse, and the cat. There are other things there, of course, but there is only one other thing connected with the story, and that is a jug half-full of water. The cat, jumping after the mouse, overturns this jug, and the water flows till it reaches the edge of the dresser, whence it drips, drips, drips, upon the floor. This is the tick, tick, tick which the woman upstairs hears—the death-tick of her mother-in-law! Her mother-in-law is eighty-seven years of age, and has been ill for months; her death is daily expected. She dies on this night, and the story is complete. A dying old woman, eighty-seven years of age, her daughter-in-law who has eaten too much supper, a plate of crumbs, a jug with water in it, a cat, and a mouse. Of these simple materials is a message from the unseen world created, which entrals the entire neighbourhood. Analyse the miracles handed down from ancient times, some of which are woven into the religious beliefs of the people, and you will find that they are composed of parts as common and vulgar.”

I made no attempt to interrupt Devlin in his narration of this commonplace story. He had, when he chose to exercise it, a singularly fascinating manner, and his voice

was melodious, and when he paused I felt as if I had been listening to an attractive romance. While he spoke, his fingers were playing with a penholder and a pencil which were on the table ; the penholder was long, the pencil was short, and I observed that he had placed one upon the other in the form of a cross.

"I am dull, perhaps," I said, "but I do not see how your story proves me to be illogical and inconsistent."

"I related it," replied Devlin, looking at the cross, "simply to show how willing people are to believe in the supernatural. My worthy landlady believes that *I* am a supernatural being ; her husband believes it ; *you* are inclined to lend a ready ear to it. And yet you tell me that you will be satisfied with a sacred and holy pledge from me, knowing, if you are at all correct in your estimate of me, that such a pledge is of as much weight and value as a soap bubble. How easy for me to give you this pledge ! And all the while I may be a direct accessory in the tragedy you have resolved to unriddle."

"I thank you for reminding me," I said. "You shall swear to me that you have had no hand in this most horrible and dastardly murder."

"More inconsistency, more lack of logical perception," he said, and the magnetism in his eyes compelled me to fix my gaze upon the cross on the table. "You ask me to swear, and you will be content with my oath. I render you my obligations for your faith in my veracity. How shall I swear ? How shall I deliver myself of the sacred and holy pledge ? There are so many forms, so many symbols, of pledging one's mortal heart and immortal soul. The civilised Jew, when he is married to his beloved under the canopy, grinds a wine glass to dust with the heel of his boot, and the guests and relatives, especially the relatives of the bride, lift up their voices in joyful praise, with the conscious self-delusion that this sacred rite insures the faithfulness of the bridegroom to the woman he has wedded. Some burn wax candles—very bad wax often—for the

release of souls from purgatory. The Chinaman, called upon for his oath, blows out a candle, twists the neck of a terrified cock, or smashes a saucer. The Christian kisses the New Testament ; the Jew kisses the Old. The Christian swears with his hat off ; the Jew with his hat on. I could multiply anomalies, all opposed to each other. Which kind of obligation would you prefer from me ? A cock or a hen ? Produce the sacred symbol, and I am ready. Shall my head be covered or uncovered ? As you please. Ah, how strange ! With this pencil and penholder my fingers have insensibly formed a cross. Shall I swear upon that, and will it content you ? Take your choice, my dear sir, take your choice. Call me Jew, Christian, Pagan, Chinaman—which you please. I am willing to oblige you. Or shall we be sensible. Will you take my simple word for it ?"

"I will," I said ; "but I must have a hostage."

"Anything, anything, my dear sir. Give it a name."

"Your desk," I said, "which not unlikely contains private writings and confessions."

"It does," he replied, tapping on the desk with his knuckles. "You little dream of the treasures, the strange secrets, herein contained. You would have this as a hostage ?"

"I would."

"It shall be yours, on the understanding that if I claim it from you within three months after the mystery of the murder of Lizzie Melladew is cleared up, you will deliver it to me again intact, with its contents unread."

"I promise faithfully," I said.

"I must trouble you," he said ; and he suddenly placed his hand upon my forehead, and stood over me. "Yes," he said, resuming his seat, "the promise is faithfully made. You will keep it."

He locked the desk, and pushed it across the table to me, putting the key in his pocket.

"And now, your word of truth and honour," I said.

"Give me your hand. On my truth and honour I pledge

myself to you. Moreover, if it will ease your mind of an absurd suspicion, I declare, on my truth and honour, that I have had nothing whatever to do with this murder."

His words carried conviction with them.

"But you will assist me in my search?" I said.

"To the extent of my power. Understand, however, that I do not undertake that your search shall be successful. It does not depend upon me; accident will probably play its part in the matter. There is a clause, moreover, in our agreement to which I require your adhesion. It is, that during your search you will do nothing to fasten publicity upon me, and that, in the event of your succeeding, I shall not be dragged into the case."

"Unless you are required as a witness," I said.

"I shall not be required. I have no evidence to offer which a court of law would accept."

"Who is to be the judge of that?"

"You yourself."

"I agree. You must not regard me as a spy upon your movements when I tell you I shall sleep in this house to-night."

"Not at all. That you are a man of mettle—a man who can form a resolution and carry it out, never mind at what inconvenience to yourself—makes your company agreeable to me. I like you; I accept you as my comrade, for a brief space, in lieu of that miserable groveller Lemon, who has no more strength of nerve than a jelly-fish. Sleep in the house, and welcome. Sleep in this room."

"Where?" I asked, looking around for the accommodation.

"A shake-down on the floor. Our mutual good friend Mrs. Lemon shall bring up a mattress, a pillow, a sheet, and a pair of blankets, and you shall lie snug and warm. I do not offer you my own bed, for I know that, having the instincts of a gentleman, you would not accept it, but I offer you the hospitality of my poor apartment. We will sup together, we will sleep together, in the morning we will

breakfast together, and we will go out to business together, you taking the position of poor Lemon, whom, from this moment, I cast off for ever. What say you?"

I debated with myself. It was important that I should not lose sight of Devlin; left to my own resources, I should not know how to proceed; I depended entirely upon him to supply me with a clue. But what could be his reason for proposing that we should go out to business together? Of what use could I be in a barber's shop, and how would my presence there assist me? As, however, he appeared to be dealing frankly and honestly, my best course perhaps would be to do the same. Therefore I put the questions which perplexed me in plain language.

"My dear sir," he replied, "in my place of business, and in no other place, shall we be able to find a starting-point. Do not entail upon me the necessity of saying 'upon my truth and honour' to everything I advance. Have confidence in me, and you will be a thousand pounds the richer, probably two, if the gentleman who made you the offer keeps his word."

I hesitated no longer. I would act frankly and boldly, and for the next twenty-four hours at least would be guided by him.

"I accept your hospitality," I said, "and will do as you wish."

"Good," he said, rubbing his hands; "we may regard the campaign as opened. Woe to the murderer! Justice shall overtake him; he shall hang!" He uttered these words in a tone of malignant satisfaction, and as though the prospect of any man being hanged was thoroughly agreeable to him. "I will prove to you," he continued, "how completely you can trust me. You came here to-day with the intention of returning home and sleeping there. Your absence will alarm your wife. You must write to her."

He placed notepaper and envelopes before me, and took from the mantelshelf a penny stone bottle of ink, then

pointed to the pen which formed part of the cross upon the table.

I wrote a line to my wife, informing her that events of great importance had occurred in relation to the murder of Lizzie Melladew, and that, for the purpose of following up the threads of a possible discovery, I intended to sleep out to-night; I desired her in my letter to go and see Mr. Portland and tell him that I was engaged in the task he had intrusted to me, and believed I should soon be in possession of a clue. "Have no anxiety for me," I said; "I am quite safe, and no harm will befall me. The prospect of unravelling this dreadful mystery fills me with joy." She would know what I meant by this; the murderer discovered, we should be comparatively rich. I fastened and addressed my letter.

"It should reach her hands to-night," said Devlin.
"How will you send it?"

I stepped to the window, and, looking out, distinguished the figures of George Carton and Mr. Kenneth Dowsett. Mr. Dowsett seemed to be endeavouring, unavailingly, to persuade his ward to come away with him. I could employ no better messenger than George Carton; he should take my letter to my wife. Returning to the centre of the room, my eyes fell upon Devlin's desk. Devlin smiled and nodded; he knew what was passing in my mind.

"I shall send my letter," I said, "by the hands of George Carton, who is still in the square, and I shall send your desk with it."

"Do so," said Devlin.

I opened the envelope, and tearing it into very small pieces flung them out of window. Devlin smiled again.

"So that I should not discover your address," he said.

"That is it," I replied.

"It is likely," he said, "to be not very far from Mr. Melladew, because you and he are friends."

I added a few words to my letter, desiring my wife to put the desk in a place of safety; and then, addressing

another envelope, I went down-stairs, bearing both desk and letter.

"I shall be here when you come back," said Devlin.
"Even were I protean, I shall not change my shape. My word is given."

On my way to the street-door I encountered Fanny Lemon.

"Well, sir?" she asked anxiously.

"I will speak to you presently," I said, and, opening the street-door, crossed the road to where George Carton and his guardian were standing.

CHAPTER XXII.

I SEND DEVLIN'S DESK TO MY WIFE, AND SMOKE A FRAGRANT CIGAR.

"THIS foolish, headstrong lad will be the death of me," said Mr. Dowsett in a fretful tone, "and of himself as well."

"I am neither foolish nor headstrong," retorted the unhappy young man. "I told you he was in there still, and you told me he had left the house."

"I said it for your good," said Mr. Dowsett, "but you will not be ruled."

"No, I will not!" exclaimed George Carton violently; and then said remorsefully, "I beg you to forgive me for speaking so wildly; it is the height of ingratitude after all your goodness to me. But do you not see—for God's sake, do you not see—that you are making things worse instead of better for me by opposing me as you are doing? I will have my way! I will, whether I am right or wrong!"

"My poor boy," said Mr. Dowsett, addressing me, "has got it into his foolish head that you can be of some assistance to him. In heaven's name, how can you be?"

"Mr. Dowsett," I said, and the strange experiences of the last few hours imported, I felt, a solemnity into my voice, "the ends of justice are sometimes reached by roads we cannot see. It may be so in this sad instance."

"There," said George Carton to his guardian, in a tone of melancholy triumph, "did I not tell you?"

Mr. Dowsett shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and said, "I declare that if I did not love my ward with a love as sincere and perfect as any human being ever felt for another, I would wash my hands of this business altogether."

"But why," said Carton, with much affection, "do you torment yourself about it at all?"

"It is you I torment myself about," said Mr. Dowsett, "not the horrible deed. I love you with a father's love, and I cannot leave you in the state you are."

George Carton put his arm around his guardian caressingly. "I am not worth it," he murmured; "I am not worth it; but I cannot act otherwise than I do. Sir"—to me—"I have lingered here in the hope that you might have some news to tell me."

"I have nothing I can communicate to you," I said; "but rest assured that my interest in the discovery of the murderer is scarcely less than yours. I have taken up the search, and I will not rest while there is the shadow of a hope left."

"I knew it, I knew it," said George Carton.

"Knowing it, then," I said, "and receiving the assurance from my lips, will you do me a service, and be guided by my advice?"

"I will, indeed I will," replied Carton.

"It is heartbreaking," said Mr. Dowsett mournfully, turning his head, "to find a stranger's counsel preferred to mine."

"No, no," cried George Carton, "I declare to you, no! But you would have me do nothing, and I cannot obey you. I cannot—I cannot sit idly down, and make no

effort in the cause of justice. My dear Lizzie is dead, and I do not care to live. But I will live for one thing—revenge!"

"Be calm," I said, taking the young man's fevered hand, "and listen to me. I wish you to take this letter and desk to my wife, and deliver them to her with your own hands. Will you do so?"

"Yes."

"You must not part with them under any pretext or persuasion until you place them in my wife's possession."

"No one shall touch them till she receives them."

"You must go at once, for she is anxious about me. I intend to sleep here to-night. And when you have done what I ask you, I beg you to go home with your guardian, and have a good night's rest."

He looked discontented at this, but Mr. Dowsett said, "Be persuaded, George, be persuaded!"

"Believe me," I said, speaking very earnestly, "that it will be for the best."

"Very well, sir. I will do as you desire. But"—turning to Mr. Dowsett—"no opiates. If sleep comes to me, it shall come naturally."

"I promise you, George," said Mr. Dowsett; "and now let us go. Thank you, sir, thank you a thousand times, for having prevailed upon my ward to do what is right. Come, George, come."

He was so anxious to get the young man away that he advanced a few steps quickly; thus for two or three moments Carton and I were alone.

"Shall I see you to-morrow, sir," asked Carton.

"In all probability," I replied; "but do not seek me here. I have your address, and will either call upon or write to you."

"Then I am to remain home all day?"

"Yes. By following my instructions you will be rendering me practical assistance."

"Very well, sir. I put all my trust in you."

"Are you coming, George?" cried Mr. Dowsett, looking back.

"Yes, I am ready," said the young man, joining his guardian; and presently they were both out of sight.

I reentered the house. Fanny Lemon was still in the passage.

"Fanny," I said, "I cannot keep long with you, as I have business up-stairs with Mr. Devlin; but I wish to impress upon you not to speak to a single soul of what has passed between us to-day. Say nothing to anybody about Mr. Lemon being ill, and, above all, do not call in a doctor. Doctors are apt to be inquisitive, and it is of the highest importance that curiosity shall not be aroused in the minds of the neighbours. There is nothing radically wrong with Lemon; he has received a fright, and his nerves are shaken, that is all. Tell him that I have taken his place with Devlin, and that the partnership is at an end. That will relieve his mind. Keep him quiet, and give him nothing to drink but milk or barley water. Lower his system, Fanny, lower his system."

"Don't you think it low enough already, sir?" asked Fanny.

"I do not; he is in a state of dangerous excitement, and everything must be done to soothe and quiet him. But I have no more time to waste. You will do as I have told you?"

"Yes, sir, I'll be careful to. But are you sure he don't want a doctor? Are you sure he won't die?"

"Quite sure; and you can tell him, if you like, that *I* say it is all right."

"Is it all right, sir?"

"If it isn't, I'm going to try to make it so. I shall sleep here to-night, Fanny."

"And welcome, sir. We haven't a spare bedroom, but I can make you up a bed on the sofa in the parlour."

"I shall not need it. I am going to sleep in Devlin's room, on the floor."

She caught my arm with a cry of alarm. "Has he got hold of you, too, sir? The Lord save us! He's got the lot of us in his claws!"

"Don't be absurd," I said. "I know what I'm about, and Mr. Devlin will find me a match for him. No more questions; do as you are bid. If you have a mattress and some bedclothes to spare, bring them up at once."

"I won't look at him, sir—I won't speak to him! O, how shall I ever forgive myself—how shall I ever forgive myself?"

She threw her apron (which during my absence she had put on over her faded black silk dress) over her head, and swayed to and fro in the passage, moaning and groaning in great distress of mind.

I pulled the apron from her face, and gave her a good shaking by way of corrective. She ceased her moans.

"I have no patience with you, Fanny," I exclaimed. "In heaven's name, what do you want to be forgiven for?"

"For dragging you into this horrible business, sir," she said, with a tendency to relapse, which I immediately checked by another shaking. "That—that devil upstairs——"

This time I shook her so soundly that she could not get out another word for the chattering of her teeth.

"No more, Fanny," I said roughly, "or you will make me angry. I know what I am about, and if you don't stop instantly and do exactly as I bid you, I'll leave you and your Lemon to your fate. Do you hear?"

The threat terrified her into calmness.

"I'll bring up the bed-things, sir," she said, with bated breath.

"And lose no time," I said, as I mounted the stairs.

"I won't, sir."

Devlin was smoking when I joined him, and not smoking a pipe, but a cigar with a most delicious fragrance.

"Take one," he said, pushing a cigar-ease over to me;

"you will find them good. I manufactured them while you were away."

I bore good-humouredly with his banter, and I took a cigar from the case, but did not immediately light it.

"Sent your letter?" he inquired curtly.

"Yes."

"And my desk?"

"Yes."

"By Lizzie Melladew's sweetheart?"

"Yes."

"Not by the other?"

"No."

"Do they live together?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where?"

"Yes."

"Capital!" he said, with the air of a man who had been asking important instead of trivial questions. "There is a knock at the door—a frightened, feminine knock. Enter, my dear Mrs. Lemon, enter."

Fanny Lemon came in, smothered with a mattress, sheets, blankets, and pillows, and, without uttering a word, proceeded to make the bed on the floor.

"You have brought plenty of pillows, Fanny," I remarked.

"I thought you'd like to lay high, sir," she whispered.

Devlin broke out into a loud laugh. "Most people do," he said, "while they live. When they die they all lie low—all of them, all of them!"

For a moment I thought that Fanny was going to run away, but a look from me restrained her, and she finished making the bed.

"Do you wish anything else, sir?" she asked, still in a whisper, and keeping her back to Devlin.

"Yes, my charming landlady, yes," replied Devlin. "A large pot of your exquisite tea. Fly!"

"Make it, Fanny, and bring it up," I said.

She flew, and returned with the steaming pot. Surely never was tea so quickly prepared before. The pot, milk, sugar, and two cups and saucers were on a tray, which, without raising her eyes, she placed before me.

"Here, here," cried Devlin, tapping the table. "Before me, my dear creature! I am the host on this occasion."

She slid the tray over to him, and he made a motion as if he were about to place his hand on her.

"If you lay a finger on me," she exclaimed, beating a hasty retreat from the table, "I'll scream the house down!"

"Leave the room," I said sternly; "and call us at seven in the morning."

"We shall be here, my dear creature," added Devlin. "You will find both of us safe and sound, ready to do justice to your excellent cooking. I have a premonition of a fine appetite for breakfast; cook me an extra rasher."

I saw in Fanny's eyes a desire to say a word to me alone. Devlin saw it too.

"Humour her," he said, and quoted a line from a comedy. "What is the use of a friend if you can't make a stranger of him?"

I followed Fanny into the passage.

"You've quite made up your mind, sir?"

"Quite, Fanny."

"Take this, sir," she said, pushing a hard substance into my hands. "If anything happens in the night, spring it."

It was a policeman's rattle.

"I don't know where Lemon got it from," she said, "but we've had it in the house for years."

"Pshaw, Fanny!" I said, forcing the rattle back into her hands. "You are too ridiculous!"

Yet when I was once again face to face with Devlin, with the door locked, I could not help thinking that I was acting a perilous part in putting myself, as it were, into

his power. He might kill me while I slept. I determined to keep awake, and to lie down in my clothes.

"Have some tea?" he asked.

"Thank you," I replied. The tea would assist me in my resolve not to sleep.

The teapot being emptied, I lit the cigar Devlin had given me.

"I owe you an explanation," he said, puffing the smoke from his cigar into a series of circles. "I take it as a fact that Lemon is suffering from some kind of prophetic vision in connection with the murder of Lizzie Mel-ladew in Victoria Park on Friday night."

"It is so," I said.

"Part of my explanation lies in the admission that he received that forewarning from me."

"Then you knew it was done," I cried.

"I did not know it. It passed through the mind of a customer whose hair I was dressing. I do not call that knowing a thing. I am something of a thought-reader, my dear sir, and I possess a certain power, under suitable conditions, of conveying my impressions to another person. That is the extent of my explanation. Excuse me for making it so brief."

Never in my life had I smoked a cigar with a fragrance so exquisite. Not only exquisite, but overpowering. It beguiled my senses, and had such an effect upon me that the last twenty or thirty words uttered by Devlin seemed to be spoken at a great distance from me. This sense of distance affected not only his voice, but himself and all surrounding things. He and they seemed to recede into space, as it were, not bounded by the walls of the small apartment in which we were sitting. I had a dim desire to continue the conversation, and to press Devlin to be more explicit, but it died away. Everything floated in a mist around me, and in this state I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I PASS A MORNING IN DEVLIN'S PLACE OF BUSINESS.

DEVLIN was up and dressed when I awoke in the morning. I had not to go through the trouble of putting on my clothes, as I had not taken them off on the previous night. It would not have surprised me to find that I had unconsciously sought repose in the usual way, or that I had risen in my sleep to undress; nothing, indeed, would very much have surprised me, so strange had been my dreaming fancies. Naturally they all turned upon Devlin and the case upon which I was engaged. I could easily write a chapter upon them, but I will content myself with briefly describing one of the strangest of them all.

I was sitting in a chair, opposite a mirror, in which I saw everything that was passing in the room. Devlin was standing over me, dressing my hair. Suddenly I saw a sharp surgical instrument in his hand.

"That is not a razor," I said, "and I don't want to be shaved."

"My dear sir," remarked Devlin, with excessive politeness, "what you want or what you don't want matters little."

With that he made a straight cut across the top of my head, and laid bare my brains. I saw them and every little cell in them quite distinctly.

"To think," he observed, as he peered into the cavities, "that in this small compass should abide the passions, the emotions, the meannesses, the noble aspirations, the sordid desires, the selfish instincts and the power to resist them, the sense of duty, the conscious deceits, the lust for power, the grovelling worship, the filthy qualities of animalism, the secret promptings, and all the motley mental and moral attributes which make a man! To think that from this small compass have sprung all that constitutes man's history—religion, ethics, the rise and fall of nations, music,

poetry, law, and science ! How grand, how noble does this man, who represents humankind, think himself ! What works he has executed, what marvels discovered ! But if the truth were known, he is a mere dabbler, who, out of his conceit, magnifies the smallest of molehills into the largest of mountains. He can build a bridge, but he cannot make a flower that shall bloom to-day and die to-morrow. He can destroy, but he cannot create. In the open page of Nature he makes the most trivial of discoveries, and he straightway writes himself up in letters of gold and builds monuments in his honour. The stars mock him ; the mountains of snow look loftily down upon the pigmy ; the gossamer fly which his eyes can scarcely see triumphs over his highest efforts. But he has invented for himself a supreme shelter for defeat and decay. Dear me, dear me—I cannot find it ! ”

“ What are you looking for ? ” I asked. “ Be kind enough to leave my brains alone.” For he was industriously probing them with some sensitive instrument.

“ I am looking for your grand invention, your soul. I am wondrously wise, but I have never yet been able to discover its precise locality.”

After some further search he shut up my head, so to speak, and my fancies took another direction.

All these vagaries seemed to be tumbling over each other in my brain as I rose from my bed on the floor.

“ Had a good night ? ” asked Devlin.

“ If being asleep,” I replied, “ means having a good night, I have had it. But my head is in a whirl, nevertheless.”

“ Keep it cool if you can,” said Devlin, “ for what you have to go through. You will find water and soap inside.”

He pointed to the little closet adjoining his room, and there I found all that was necessary for my toilet. I had just finished when Fanny knocked at the door.

“ It’s all right, Fanny,” I cried. “ You can get breakfast ready.”

"And don't forget," added Devlin, "the extra rasher for me. How is dear Lemon?"

That she did not reply and was heard beating a hasty retreat caused a broad grin to spread over Devlin's face.

"I have provided," he said, "for that worthy creature something of an entertaining, not to say entralling, nature, which she can dilate upon to the last hour of her life. And yet she is not grateful."

We went down to breakfast, and there I was afforded an opportunity of verifying the subtle likeness in Devlin's face to the portrait of Lemon on the wall, the evil-looking bird in its glass case, and the stone figure, half monster, half man, on the mantelshelf.

"There is a likeness," said Devlin pleasantly, "between my works and me, and if you will attribute me with anything human, you can attribute it to a common human failing. It springs from the vanity and the weakness of man that he can evolve only that which is within himself. Nowhere is that vanity and weakness more conspicuous than in Genesis, in the very first chapter, my dear sir, where man himself has had the audacity to write that 'God created man in His own image.' My dear Mrs. Lemon, you have excelled yourself this morning. This rasher is perfect, and your cooking of these eggs to the infinitesimal part of a second is a marvel of art."

Fanny did not open her lips to him, and the meal passed on in silence so far as she was concerned. I made a good breakfast, and Devlin expressed approval of my appetite.

"It will strengthen you," he said, "for what is before you."

Fanny looked up in alarm, and Devlin laughed. I may mention that the first thing I did when I came down-stairs was to run to the nearest newspaper shop and purchase copies of the morning papers.

"Is there anything new concerning the murder?" asked Devlin.

Fanny waited breathlessly for my reply.

"Nothing," I said.

"Have any arrests been made?"

"None."

"Of course," observed Devlin sarcastically, "the police are on the track of the murderer."

"There is something to that effect in the papers."

"Fudge!" said Devlin.

Breakfast over, Devlin said he would go up to his room for a few minutes, and bade me be ready when he came down. Alone with Fanny, she asked me whether I would like to see Lemon, adding that it would do him "a power of good."

"Is he any better?" I asked.

"I really think he is," she replied. "What I told him last night about your taking up the case was a comfort to him—though he ain't easy in his mind about you. He is afraid that Devlin will get hold of you as he did of him."

"He will not, Fanny. We shall get along famously together."

She shook her head. I failed to convince her, as I failed to convince Mr. Lemon, that I should prove a match for their lodger. Lemon presented a ludicrous picture, sitting up in bed with an old-fashioned nightcap on.

"Don't go with him, sir," he whispered, "to the Twisted Cow."

"I shall go with him," I said, "wherever he proposes to take me."

I could not help smiling at Lemon's expression of melancholy as I made this statement. He dared not give utterance to his fears of what my ultimate destination would be if I continued to keep company with Devlin. When that strange personage came down I was ready for him, and we went out together, Fanny looking after us from the street-door, shaking, I well knew, in her inward soul.

Devlin made himself exceedingly pleasant, and the

comments he passed on the people we met excited my admiration and increased my wonder. He seemed to be able to read their characters in their faces, and although I would have liked to combat his views I did not venture to oppose my judgment to his. What struck me particularly was that he saw the evil in men, not the good. Not once did he give man or woman credit for the possession of good qualities. All was mean, sordid, grasping, and selfish. He told me that we should have to walk four miles to his place of business.

"I enjoy walking," he said, "and the only riding I care for is on the top of an omnibus through squalid streets. You get peeps into garrets and one-room habitations. Gifted with the power of observation, you can see rare pictures there."

On our road I stopped at a post-office, and sent a telegram of three words to my wife : "All is well."

Our course lay in the direction of Westminster. We crossed the bridge, and turned down a narrow street, Chapel Street. Half-way down the street Devlin paused, and said,

"Behold our establishment."

It was a poor and common house, and had it not been for a barber's pole sticking out from the doorway, and a fly-blown cardboard in the parlour window, on which was written, "Barber and Hairdresser. All styles. Lowest charges," I should not have supposed that a trade was carried on therein. As we entered the passage a woman came forward and handed Devlin a key. He thanked her, unlocked the parlour door, and we went in.

The fittings in this room, which I saw at a glance was the shop in which the shaving and hair-dressing were done, were entirely out of keeping with the poor tenement in which it was situated. The walls were lined with fine mirrors ; there were three luxurious barber's chairs ; the washstands were of marble ; and the appliances for shampooing perfect.

" You would hardly expect it," observed Devlin.

" I would not," I replied.

" It is my idea," he said. " It rivals the West End establishments, and for skill I would challenge the world, if I were desirous of courting publicity. Then, the charges. One-sixth those of Truefit. I shave for a penny, cut for another penny, shampoo for another. But only those can be attended to who hold my tickets. I was compelled to adopt this plan, otherwise I should have been overwhelmed with customers. It enables me to choose them. When I see a likely man, one who is ripe, and in whom I discern possibilities which commend themselves to me, I say, ' Oblige me, sir, by accepting this ticket of admission;' and having given him a taste of my skill, he comes again. I have quite a connection." He accompanied these last words with a strange smile.

" What part do you propose to assign to me in the business ?" I asked.

" A part to which you will not object, that of looker-on. Not from this room, but that"—pointing to the back room.

" The panels of the door, you will observe, are of ground glass. Sitting within there, you can see all that passes in this room without being yourself seen. If you will keep quiet, no one will suspect that you are in hiding."

" For the life of me," I said, " I cannot guess what good my sitting in there will do."

" I do not suppose you can; but learn from me that I do nothing without a motive. I do not care to be questioned too closely. The promise I have made to you will be kept if you do not thwart it. You may see something that will surprise you. I say 'may,' because I have not the power to entirely rule men's movements. But I think it almost certain he will pay me a visit this morning."

" He ?" I cried. " Who ?"

" The man whose thoughts I read on Friday with respect to the girl who was murdered on that night."

I started. If Devlin spoke the truth, and if the man

came to his shop this morning, I should be in possession of a practical clue which would lead me to the goal I wished to reach.

"He comes regularly," continued Devlin, "on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. This is his day."

"Do you know his name?" I inquired, in great excitement.

"I did not," replied Devlin, "the last time I saw him. How should I know it now?"

"Nor where he lives?"

"Nor where he lives."

"I must obey you, I suppose," I said.

"It will be advisable, and you must obey me implicitly. Deviate by a hair's breadth from what I require of you, and I withdraw my promise, which now exists in full integrity. Decide."

"I have decided. I will remain in that room."

"There is another point upon which I must insist positively. From that room you do not stir until I bid you; in that room you do not speak unless you receive a cue from me. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

"On your honour?"

"On my honour."

"Good. Now you can retire. You will find books in there to amuse you if you get wearied with your watch."

He opened the door for me, and closed it upon me. He had spoken correctly. Through the ground glass I could see everything in the shop, and I took his word for it that I could not myself be seen.

Scarcely had a minute passed before a customer entered. Devlin, who, while he was arguing with me, had taken off his coat, and put on a linen jacket of spotless white, behaved most decorously. His manner was deferential without being subservient, respectful without being familiar. The man was shaved by Devlin, and then his head was brushed by machinery, which I had forgotten to mention was fixed

in the shop. There was a caressing motion about Devlin's shapely hands which could not but be agreeable to those who sought his tonsorial aid, and his conversation, judging from the expression on his customer's face, must have been amusing and entertaining. The customer took his departure, and another, appearing as he went out, was duly attended to. This went on until eleven o'clock by my watch, and nothing had occurred of especial interest to me. Devlin was kept pretty busy; but, although his time was fully employed, the business at such prices could not have been remunerative, especially when it was considered that the fitting up of the shop must have cost a pretty sum of money, and that the profits of the concern had to be divided between two persons, Mr. Lemon and himself. It was not till past eleven that my attention was more than ordinarily attracted by Devlin's behaviour, the difference in which perhaps no one except myself would have particularly noticed. A man of the middle class entered and took his seat. He wore a beard and moustache; and although I could not hear what he said, he spoke in so low a tone, I judged correctly that he instructed Devlin to shave his face bare. Devlin proceeded to obey him, and clipped and cut, and finally applied his razor until not a vestige of hair was left on the man's face. That being done, Devlin cut this customer's hair close, and then used his brushes; and as his hands moved about the man's head there was, if I may so describe it, a feline, insinuating expression in them which aroused my curiosity. I thought of the singular dream I have described, and it appeared to me that all the while Devlin was employed over his customer the brains of the man sitting so quietly in the chair were figuratively exposed to his view, and that he was reading the thoughts which stirred therein. When the man was gone there was a peculiar smile upon Devlin's face, and I observed that he laughed quietly to himself. There happened to be no one in the shop to claim Devlin's attention, and I, who was impatiently waiting for some sign from Devlin pertinent to the secret purpose to

which both he and I were pledged, expected it to be given now; for the circumstance of the man having been shaved bare—which so altered his appearance that I should not otherwise have known that the person who entered the shop was the same person who left it—was to me so suspicious that in my anxiety and agitation I connected it with the murder of poor Lizzie Melladew, arguing that the man had effected this disguise in himself for the purpose of escaping detection. But Devlin made no sign, and did not even look towards the glass-door. Other customers coming in, Devlin was busy again. Twelve o'clock—half-past twelve—one o'clock—and still no indication of anything in connection with my task. With a feeling of intense disappointment, and beginning to doubt whether I had not allowed myself to be duped, I replaced my watch in my pocket, and had scarcely done so before my heart was beating violently at the appearance of a gentleman whom I little expected to see in Devlin's shop. This gentleman was no other than Mr. Kenneth Dowsett, George Carton's guardian.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. KENNETH DOWSETT GIVES ME THE SLIP.

THE beating of my heart became normal; I suppose it was the sudden appearance of a gentleman with whose face I was familiar, after many hours of suspense, that had caused its pulsations to become so rapid and violent. There was nothing surprising, after all, in the presence of Mr. Dowsett in Devlin's shop. His address was in Westminster, Devlin was an exceptionally fine workman, the accommodation was luxurious, the charges low. Even I, in my position in life, would be tempted to deal occasionally with so expert and perfect a barber as Devlin, at the prices he charged. Then, why not Mr. Kenneth Dowsett? Besides, he might be of a frugal turn.

Devlin was not long engaged over him. Mr. Dowsett was shaved; Mr. Dowsett had his hair brushed by machinery; Mr. Dowsett, moreover, was very particular as to the arrangement of his hair; and Devlin, I saw, did his best to please him. But so deft and facile was Devlin that he did not dally with Mr. Dowsett for longer than five or six minutes. Mr. Dowsett rose, paid Devlin, exchanged a few smiling words with him, and taking a final look at himself in the mirrors, turning himself this way and that, walked out of the shop. Evidently Mr. Dowsett was a very vain man.

No sooner was he gone than Devlin locked the shop-door from within, whipped off his linen jacket, and opened the door of the room in which I was sitting. I came forward in no amiable mood.

"You are wearied with your long enforced rest," said Devlin.

"I am wearied and disgusted," I retorted. "I expected a clue."

"Have you not received it?" asked Devlin, smiling.

"Received it!" I echoed. "How? Where?"

"You have seen my customers, and all that has passed between me and them."

"Well?"

"Well?" he said, mocking me. "Is there not one among them upon whom your suspicions are fixed? Is there not one among them who could, if he chose, supply us with a starting-point? I say 'us,' because we are comrades."

"Fool, fool, that I was!" I exclaimed, involuntarily raising my hand to my forehead. "Why did I allow him to escape?"

"Why did you let whom escape you?" asked Devlin, in a bantering tone.

"The man whose beard and moustache you shaved off He must have a reason, a vital reason, for effecting this

disguise in himself. And I have let him slip through my fingers!"

"He has a vital reason for so disguising himself," said Devlin, "but it has no connection with the murder of Lizzie Melladew."

"Then what do you mean?" I cried, "by asking me whether I have not received a clue?"

"Was your attention attracted to no other of my customers than this man?"

"There was only one who was known to me—Mr. Kenneth Dowsett."

"Ah!" said Devlin. "Mr. Kenneth Dowsett."

A light seemed to dawn suddenly upon me, but the suggestion conveyed in Devlin's significant tone so amazed me that I could not receive it unquestioningly.

"Do you mean to tell me," I cried, "that you suspect Mr. Dowsett of complicity in this frightful murder?"

"I mean to tell you nothing of my suspicions," replied Devlin. "It is for you, not for me, to suspect. It is for you, not for me, to draw conclusions. What I know positively of Mr. Dowsett—with whose name I was unacquainted until last evening, when you mentioned it in Lemon's house—I will tell you, if you wish."

"Tell me, then."

"It is short but pregnant. Through Mr. Kenneth Dowsett's mind, as I shaved him and dressed his hair on Friday last, passed the picture of a beautiful girl, with golden hair, wearing a bunch of white daisies in her belt. Through his mind passed a picture of a lake of still water in Victoria Park. Through his mind passed a vision of blood."

"Are you a devil," I exclaimed, "that you did not step in to prevent the deed?"

"My dear sir," he said, seizing my arm, which I had involuntarily raised, and holding it as in a vice, "you are unreasonable. I have never in my life been in Victoria Park, which, I believe, covers a large space of ground.

Why should I elect to pass an intensely uncomfortable night, wandering about paths in an unknown place, to interfere in I know not what? Even were I an interested party, it would be an act of folly, for such a proceeding would lay me open to suspicion. A nice task you would allot to me when you tacitly declare that it should be my mission to prevent the commission of human crime! Then how was I to gauge the precise value of Mr. Dowsett's thoughts? He might be a dramatist, inventing a sensational plot for a popular theatre; he might be an author of exciting fiction. Give over your absurdities, and school yourself into calmer methods. Unless you do so, you will have small chance of unravelling this mystery. And consider, my dear sir," he added, making me a mocking bow, "if I am a devil, how honoured you should be that I accept you as my comrade!"

The tone in which he spoke was calm and measured; indeed, it had not escaped my observation that, whether he was inclined to be malignant or agreeable, insinuating or threatening, he never raised his voice above a certain pitch. I inwardly acknowledged the wisdom of his counsel that I should keep my passion in control, and I resolved from that moment to follow it.

"You locked the shop-door," I said, "when Mr. Dowsett left you just now."

"I did," was his response, "thinking it would be your wish that I should do no more business to-day."

"Why should you think that?"

"Because of what was passing through Mr. Dowsett's mind."

"I ask you to pardon me for my display of passion. What was Mr. Dowsett thinking of?"

"Of two very simple matters," said Devlin; "the time of day and an address. The time was fifteen minutes past three, the address, 28 Athelstan Road."

"Nothing more?" I inquired, much puzzled.

"Nothing more."

I pondered a moment; I could draw no immediate conclusion from material so bare. I asked Devlin what he could make of it; he replied, politely, that it was for me, not for him, to make what I could of it. A suggestion presented itself.

"At fifteen minutes past three," I said, "Mr. Dowsett has an appointment with some person at 28 Athelstan Road."

"Possibly," said Devlin.

"Have you a 'London Directory'?"

"I have not; nor, I imagine, will you easily find one in this neighbourhood."

"A simpler plan," I said, "perhaps will be to go to Mr. Dowsett's house, to which he has most likely returned, and set watch there for him, keeping ourselves well out of sight. It is now twenty minutes past one; we can reach his house in ten minutes. He will hardly leave it for his appointment till two, or a little past. We will follow him secretly, and ascertain whom he is going to see, and his purpose. I am determined now to adopt bold measures. Behind this frightful mystery there is another, which shall be brought to light. You will accompany me?"

"I am at your orders," said Devlin.

We left the house together, and in the time I specified were within a few yards of Mr. Dowsett's residence. Aware of the importance of not attracting attention, I looked about for a means of escaping observation. Nearly opposite Mr. Dowsett's dwelling was a public-house, in the first-floor window of which I saw a placard, "Billiards. Pool." I concluded that it was the window of a billiard-room, and without hesitation I entered the public-house, followed by Devlin, and mounted the stairs. The room, as I supposed, contained a billiard-table; the marker, a very pale and very thin youth, was practising the spot stroke.

"Billiards, sir?" he asked, as we entered.

"Yes," I said, "we wish to play a private game. How much an hour?"

"Eighteenpence."

"Here are five shillings," I said, "for a couple of hours. We shall not want you to mark. Don't let us be disturbed."

The pale thin youth took the money, laid down his cue, and left us to ourselves. When he was gone I placed a chair at an angle against the handle of the door, there being no key in the lock, and thus prevented the entrance of any person without notice. It was the leisure time of the day, and there was little fear of our being disturbed. The extra gratuity I had given to the marker would insure privacy. As I took my station at the window, from which Mr. Dowsett's house was in full view, Devlin nodded approval of my proceedings.

"You are a man of resource," he said. "I perceive that you intend henceforth to act sensibly."

Minute after minute passed, and there was no sign of any person leaving or entering Mr. Dowsett's house. Every now and then I consulted my watch. Two o'clock—a quarter-past two—half-past. I began to grow impatient, but, to please Devlin, did not exhibit it. Perfect silence reigned between us; we exchanged not a word.

Time waned, and now I more frequently looked at my watch, the hands of which were drawing on to three. They reached the hour and passed it. A quarter-past three.

Perplexed and disappointed, I debated on my next move. I soon decided what it should be. I had promised Richard Carton that I would call upon him. I would do so now. If Mr. Dowsett was at home, all the better.

I made Devlin acquainted with my resolve, and he said, "Very good; I will go with you."

Removing the chair I had placed against the handle of the door, we went from the public-house and crossed the road. I knocked at Mr. Dowsett's door, and a maid-servant answered the summons.

"Does Mr. Kenneth Dowsett live here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he at home?"

"No, sir."

"Is Mr. Richard Carton in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give him my card, and say I wish to see him."

"Will you please walk this way, sir?" said the maid-servant.

She ushered us into the dining-room, where she left us alone while she went to apprise Richard Carton of my visit. The room was exceedingly well furnished. Good pictures were on the walls, and there was a tasteful arrangement of bric-à-brac and bronzes. I had no time for further observation, the entrance of Richard Carton claiming my attention.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "you have come. I was beginning to be afraid you would disappoint me."

"You delivered my letter to my wife?" I asked.

"Yes, and the desk. My guardian wanted to persuade me to leave it till this morning, but I would not."

"You were quite right."

He looked towards Devlin.

"A friend," I said, waving my hand as a kind of introduction, "who may be of assistance to us."

"But introduce us plainly," expostulated Devlin.

"Mr. Devlin," I said, "Mr. Richard Carton."

They shook hands, and then Carton inquired whether I had anything to tell him.

"Nothing tangible," I replied, "but we are on the road."

"Yes," repeated Devlin, "we are on the road."

"Excuse me for asking," said Carton to Devlin, "but are you a detective?"

"In a spiritual way," said Devlin.

Carton's mind was too deeply occupied with the one supreme subject of the murder to ask for an explanation of this enigmatical reply. He turned towards me.

"Is your guardian in?" I inquired.

"No," said Carton.

What should I say next? It would have been folly to make Richard Carton a participant in the strange revelations which were directing my proceedings.

"Can you tell me," I asked, "where Athelstan Road is?"

"It is in Margate," he replied, in a tone of surprise, "and the number is 28."

It was my turn now to exhibit surprise. "No. 28!" I exclaimed. "Who lives there?"

"I don't know. Mrs. Dowsett and Letitia went to Margate by an early train on Saturday morning, before I was awake, and my guardian has gone there to see them. I should have proposed to go with him had it not been for my determination not to leave London till this dreadful mystery was cleared up; and then there was the promise you made me give you last night, that I should remain here all the day till you came to see me."

"When did your guardian go to Margate?" I asked.

"He has gone from Victoria," replied Carton, glancing at a marble clock on the mantelshelf, "by the Granville train. It starts at fifteen minutes past three."

I also glanced at the clock. It was just half-past three, a quarter of an hour past the time!

CHAPTER XXV.

WE FOLLOW IN PURSUIT.

CARTON, noticing my discomposure, inquired if there was anything wrong. I answered, yes; I was afraid there was something very wrong.

"In connection with the fate of my poor girl?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, "in connection with her fate."

"Great heavens!" he cried. "You surely do not suspect that my guardian is mixed up with it?"

"I am of the opinion," I answered guardedly, "that he may be able to throw some light on it Mr. Carton, ask me no further questions, or you may seriously hamper me. Have you a time-table in the house? No? Then we must obtain one immediately. It is my purpose to follow your guardian to Margate by the quickest and earliest train. I give you five minutes to get ready."

Greatly excited, he darted from the room, and in half the time I had named returned, with a small bag, into which he had thrust a few articles of clothing. During his absence I said to Devlin,

"You will accompany us?"

"My dear sir," he replied, "I will go with you to the ends of the earth. I shall greatly enjoy this pursuit; the vigour and spirit you are putting into it are worthy of the highest admiration."

We three went out together, and at the first book-shop I purchased an "A B C," and ascertained that the next best train to Margate was the 5.15 from Victoria, which was timed to arrive at 7.31. Calculating that it would be a few minutes late, we could, no doubt, reach Athelstan Road at half-past eight. I had time to run home to my wife, and embrace her and my children; it was necessary, also, that I should furnish myself with funds, there being very little money in my purse, and I determined to use the one hundred pounds which Mr. Portland had left with me. Employed as I was, the use of this money was justifiable. Hailing a hansom, we jumped into it, Carton sitting on Devlin's knee, and we soon reached my house. In as few words as possible I explained to my wife all that was necessary, kissed her and the children, took possession of the hundred pounds and of a light bag in which my wife had put a change of clothing, left a private message for Mr. Portland, and rejoined Devlin and Carton, who were waiting for me in the hansom. I asked my wife but two questions—the first, how Mr. and Mrs. Melladew were, the second, whether anything had been heard-of the missing

daughter Mary. She told me that the unhappy parents were completely prostrated by the blow, and that no news whatever had been heard of Mary.

We arrived at Victoria Station in good time, and, by the aid of a judicious tip, I secured a first-class compartment, into which the guard assured me no one should be admitted. I had a distinct reason for desiring this privacy. There were subjects upon which I wished to talk with Richard Carton, and I could not carry on the conversation in the presence of strangers. I said nothing to him of this in the cab, the noise of the wheels making conversation difficult. We should be two hours and a half getting to Margate, and on the journey I could obtain all the information I desired. We started promptly to the minute, and then I requested Carton to give me his best attention. He and I sat next to each other, Devlin sitting in the opposite corner. He threw himself back, and closed his eyes, but I knew that he heard every word that passed between me and Carton.

"I am going to ask you a series of questions," I said to the young man, "not one of which shall be asked from idle curiosity. Answer me as directly to the point as you can. Explain how it is that Mr. Kenneth Dowsett is your guardian."

"I lost both my parents," replied Carton, "when I was very young. Of my mother I have no remembrance whatever; of my father, but little. He and Mr. Dowsett were upon the most intimate terms of friendship; my father had such confidence in him that when he drew his will he named Mr. Dowsett as his executor and my guardian. I was to live with him and his wife, and he was to see to my education. He has faithfully fulfilled the trust my father reposed in him."

"Did your father leave a large fortune?"

"Roughly speaking, I am worth two thousand pounds a year."

"Mr. Dowsett, having to receive you in his house as a

son and to look after your education, doubtless was in receipt of a fair consideration for his services?"

"O, yes. Until I was twenty-one years of age he was to draw six hundred pounds a year out of the funds invested for me. The balance accumulated for my benefit until I came of age."

"He drew this money regularly?"

"Yes, as he was entitled to do."

"How old are you now?"

"Twenty-four."

"You are living still with Mr. Dowsett, and you still regard him as your guardian?"

"I have a great affection for him; he has treated me most kindly."

"What do you pay him for your board and lodging?"

"He continues to receive the six hundred a year. It is all he has to depend on."

"Was this last arrangement of his own proposing, or yours?"

"Of mine. I cannot sufficiently repay him for his care of me."

"In your father's will what was to become of your fortune in the event of your death?"

"If I died before I came of age, my guardian was to have the six hundred a year, and the rest was to be given to various charities."

"And after you came of age?"

"It was mine absolutely, to do as I pleased with."

"Have you made a will?"

"Yes."

"Who proposed that?"

"My guardian."

"What are the terms of this will?"

"I have left everything to him. I have no relatives, and no other claims upon me."

"When I came to see you this afternoon you mentioned a name which was new to me. You said that your guardian

had gone to Margate with his wife and 'Letitia.' I supposed he was married, and your speaking of Mrs. Dowsett did not surprise me. But who is Letitia?"

"Their daughter."

"An only child?"

"Yes."

"What is her age?"

"Twenty-two."

"Has she a sweetheart? Is she engaged to be married?"

"No."

"That answer seems to me to be given with constraint."

"Well," said Carton, "it is hardly right, is it, to go so minutely into my guardian's private family affairs?"

"It is entirely right. I am engaged upon a very solemn task, and I can see, probably, what is hidden from you. Why were you partly disinclined to answer my last question?"

"It is a little awkward," replied Carton, "because, perhaps, I am not quite free from blame."

"Explain your meaning. Believe me, this may be more serious than you imagine. Speak frankly. I am acting, indeed, as your true friend."

"Yet, after all," said Carton, with hesitation, "I never made love to her, I give you my honour."

"Made love to whom? Miss Dowsett?"

"Yes. The fact is they looked upon it as a settled thing that I was to marry Letitia. I did not know it at the time; no, though we were living in the same house for so many years, I never suspected it. I always looked upon Letitia as a sister, and I behaved affectionately towards her. They must have put a wrong construction upon it. When they discovered that I was in love with my poor Lizzie, Mr. Dowsett said to me, 'It will break Letitia's heart.' Then I began to understand, and I assure you I felt remorseful. Letitia did not say anything to me, but I could see by her

looks how deeply she was wounded. Once my guardian made the remark, ‘That if I had not met the young lady’—meaning Lizzie—‘his most joyful hope would have been realised,’ meaning by that that when I saw that Letitia loved me I might have grown to love her, and we should have been married. I said, I remember, that it might have been, for he seemed to expect something like that from me, and I said it to console him. But it was not true ; I could never have loved Letitia except as a sister.”

“Did your guardian know the name of the poor girl you have lost ?”

“O, yes. He met us first when we were walking together, and I introduced him. We had almost a quarrel, my guardian and I, some time afterwards. He said that Miss Melladew was beneath me, and that it would be better if I married in my own station in life. I was hurt and angry, and I begged him to retract his words. Beneath me ! She was as far above me as the highest lady in the land could have been. She was the best, the brightest, the purest girl in the world. And I have lost her ! I have lost her ! What hope is there left to me now ?”

He covered his face with his hands, and I waited till he was calm before I spoke again.

“In my hearing,” I then said, “you have twice made a remark which struck me as strange. It was to the effect that you would not allow your guardian to give you any more opiates.”

“He gave me one last Friday night before I went to bed—on the night my poor Lizzie was killed. I was excited, because I think I told you, sir, that it was decided between Lizzie and me that I should go to her father’s house on Sunday, to ask permission to pay my addresses openly to her. Till then I was not to see her again, and that made me restless. My guardian was anxious about me, though he did not know the cause of my restlessness and excitement. To please him I took the opiate, and slept soundly till late in the morning ; and when I woke, sir—when I

woke and went out to buy a present for Lizzie, which I intended to take to Lizzie on Sunday, almost the first thing I heard——”

He quite broke down here, and a considerable time elapsed before he was sufficiently recovered to continue the conversation.

“ Supposing,” I said, “ that this dreadful event had not occurred, and that you and poor Lizzie had been happily married, would you have continued to give your guardian the income he had enjoyed so long ?”

“ I do not know—I cannot say. Perhaps not ; although I never considered the question. But on the day that I left his house for the home I dreamt and hoped would be mine, the home in which Lizzie and I would have lived happily together, I should have given him something handsome, and I am sure I should always have been his friend. I ought not, perhaps, now that we have gone so far, to conceal anything from you.”

“ Indeed you ought not. Tell me everything ; it may help me.”

“ I am sure,” said the young fellow, with deep feeling, “ that he did not mean it, and that he said it only to comfort me. But it made me mad. He hinted that my poor Lizzie could not have been true to me, that she must have had another lover, whom she was in the habit of meeting late at night. If any other man had dared to say as much I would have killed him. But my guardian meant no harm, and when he saw how he had wounded me, he begged my pardon humbly. I am sure, I am sure he repented that he had breathed a suspicion against my poor girl !”

“ Pardon me,” I said, “ for asking you a question which, in any other circumstances, would not cross my lips ; but it will be as well for me to put it to you. You yourself had no appointment with her on that night ?”

“ No,” cried Carton indignantly, “ as Heaven is my judge ! I never met her, I never proposed to meet her, at such an hour !”

"I am certain of it. And yet—receive this calmly, if you can—and yet she must have gone out late on that night for some purpose or other."

"There is the mystery," said Carton mournfully, "and I have thought and thought about it without being able to find a key to it. There must have been a trap set for her—a devilish trap to ensnare her."

"I think so myself. Otherwise it is not likely she would have left her home, as she must have done, secretly. Now, a word or two about Mrs. Dowsett and Letitia. When you woke up on Saturday morning you found that they had gone to Margate?"

"Yes."

"Did you know on the day before that they were going?"

"No, nothing was said about it. It was quite sudden."

"Was Mrs. Dowsett or her daughter ill? Did they go into the country for their health?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Were they in the habit of going away suddenly?"

"O, no; they had never done so before."

"What explanation did your guardian give?"

"He said that Letitia had been suffering in secret for some time, and that her mother thought a change would do her good."

"Did he tell you where they had gone to?"

"No, he did not mention the place. I learnt it from one of the servants."

"So that afterwards he was forced to be frank with you?"

"I don't understand you."

"Reflect. When you rose on Saturday morning you found that Mrs. Dowsett and her daughter had gone away suddenly. You knew nothing at that moment of poor Lizzie's death, and therefore had nothing to trouble you. Did it not strike you as strange that your guardian did not mention the part of the country they had gone to? Or if, your mind being greatly occupied with the arranged inter-

view with Mr. and Mrs. Melladew on the following day, you did not then think it strange that your guardian said nothing of Margate—do you not think so now?"

"Yes," answered Carton thoughtfully, "I do think so now."

"How did you learn that Mrs. Dowsett was stopping at 28 Athelstan Road?"

"By accident. My guardian opened a letter this morning, and a piece of paper dropped from it. I picked it up, and as I gave it to him I saw 28 Athelstan Road written on it 'Is that where Mrs. Dowsett and Letitia are stopping?' I asked; and he answered, 'Yes.'"

"So that it was not directly through him that you learnt the address?"

"No; but I don't see that it is of any importance."

It was not my cue to enter into an argument, therefore I did not reply to this remark. I had gained from Carton information which, lightly as he regarded it, I deemed of the highest importance. There was, however, still something more which I desired to speak of, but which I scarcely knew how to approach. After a little reflection I made a bold plunge.

"Is your fortune under your own control?"

"Yes."

"Do you keep a large balance at your bank?"

"Pretty fair; but just now it does not amount to much. Still, if you want any——"

"I do not want any. Am I right in conjecturing that there is a special reason for your balance being small just now?"

"There is a special reason. On Saturday morning, before I left home, I drew a large cheque——"

"Which you gave to your guardian."

"How do you know that?" asked Carton, in a tone of surprise.

"It was but a guess. What was the amount of the cheque?"

" Two thousand pounds."

" Payable to 'order' or 'bearer'?"

" To 'bearer.' It was for two investments which Mr. Dowsett recommended. That was the reason for the cheque being made payable to 'bearer,' to enable my guardian to pay it to two different firms. He said both the investments would turn out splendidly, but it matters very little to me now whether they do or not. All the money in the world will not bring happiness to me now that my poor Lizzie is dead."

" Do you know whether your guardian cashed the cheque?"

" I do not; I haven't asked him anything about it. I could think only of one thing."

" I can well imagine it. Thank you for answering my questions so clearly. By and by you may know why I asked them."

These words had hardly passed my lips before Devlin, Carton, and I were thrown violently against each other. The shock was great, but fortunately we were not hurt. Screams of pain from adjoining carriages proclaimed that this was not the case with other passengers. The train was dragged with erratic force for a considerable distance, and then came to a sudden standstill.

" We had best get out," said Devlin, who was the first to recover.

We followed the sensible advice, and, upon emerging from the carriage, discovered that other carriages were overturned, and that the line was blocked. Happily, despite the screams of the frightened passengers, the injuries they had met with were slight, and when all were safely got out we stood along the line, gazing helplessly at each other. Devlin, however, was an exception; he was the only perfectly composed person amongst us.

" It is unfortunate," he said, with a certain maliciousness in his voice; " we are not half-way to Margate. The

best laid schemes are liable to come to grief. If Mr. Kenneth Dowsett knew of this, he would rejoice."

It was with intense anxiety that I made inquiries of the guard whether the accident would delay us long. The guard answered that he could not say yet, but that to all appearance we should be delayed two or three hours. I received this information with dismay. It would upon that calculation be midnight before we reached our destination. I considered time so precious that I would have given every shilling in my pocket to have been at that moment in Margate.

"Take it philosophically," said Devlin, at my elbow, "and be thankful that your bones are not broken. It will but prolong the hunt, which, I promise you, shall in the end be successful."

I looked at him almost gratefully for this speculative crumb of comfort, and there was real humour in the smile with which he met my gaze.

"Behold me in another character," he said; "Devlin the Consoler. But you have laid me under an obligation, my dear sir, which I am endeavouring to repay. Your conversation with that unhappy young man"—pointing to Carton, who stood at a little distance from us—"was truly interesting. You have mistaken your vocation; you would have made a first-class detective."

To add to the discomfiture of the situation it began to rain heavily. I felt it would be foolish, and a waste of power, to fret and fume, and I therefore endeavoured to profit by Devlin's advice to take it philosophically. A number of men were now at work setting things straight. They worked with a will, but the guard's prognostication proved correct. It was nearly eleven o'clock before we started again, and past midnight when we arrived at Margate. It was pitch dark, and the furious wind drove the pelting rain into our faces.

"A wild night at sea," cried Devlin, with a kind of exultation in his voice (though this may have been my

fancy); he had to speak very loud to make himself heard. " You can do nothing till the morning, and very little then if the storm lasts. Do you know Margate at all?"

" No," I shouted despondently.

" Do you ?" asked Devlin, addressing Carton.

" I've never been here before," replied Carton.

" There's a decent hotel not far off," said Devlin : " the Nayland Rock. We'll knock them up, and get beds there. Cling tight to me if you don't want your bones broken. Steady now, steady !"

We had to cling tightly to him, for we could not see a yard before us. Devlin pulled us along, singing some strange wild song at the top of his voice. We were a long time making those in the hotel hear us, but the door was opened at last, and we were admitted. There was only one vacant room in the hotel, but fortunately it contained two beds. To this room we were conducted, and then came the question of settling three persons in the two beds. Devlin solved the difficulty by pulling the counterpanes off, and extending himself full length upon the floor.

" This will do for me," he said, wrapping himself up in the counterpanes. " I've had worse accommodation in my travels through the world. I've slept in the bush, with the sky for a roof; I've slept in the hollow of a tree, with wild beasts howling round me; I've slept on billiard-tables and under them, with a thousand rats running over me and a score of other wanderers. Good-night, comrades."

Anxiety did not keep me awake; I was tired out, and slept well. When we awoke in the morning all signs of the storm had fled. The sun was shining brightly, and a soft warm air flowed through the open window.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANOTHER STRANGE AND UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

THE first thing to be done, after partaking of a hurried breakfast, was to arrange our programme. Carton suggested that we should all go together to Athelstan Road to see his guardian, and I had some difficulty in prevailing upon him to forego this plan. We spoke together quite openly in the presence of Devlin, who, for the most part, contented himself with listening to the discussion.

"Evidently," said Carton, "you have suspicions against my guardian, and it is only fair that he should be made acquainted with them."

"He shall be made acquainted with them," I replied, "but it must be in the way and at the time I deem best. I hold you to your promise to be guided by me."

Carton nodded discontentedly. "I am to stop here and do nothing, I suppose," he said.

"That is how you will best assist me," I said. "If you are seen at present by Mr. Dowsett, you will ruin everything. You shall not, however, be quite idle. Have you your cheque-book with you?"

"Yes," he said, producing it.

"Let me look at the block of the cheque for the two thousand pounds you drew on Saturday morning, payable to bearer, and gave to Mr. Dowsett."

"It is the last cheque I drew," said Carton, handing me the book.

I glanced at it, saw that the bank was the National Provincial Bank of England, and the number of the cheque 184,178. Then I obtained a telegraph form, and at my instruction Carton wrote the following telegram :

"To the Manager, National Provincial Bank of England, 112 Bishopsgate Street, London. Has my cheque for two thousand pounds (No. 184,178), drawn by me on Saturday, and made payable to bearer, been cashed, and

how was it paid, in notes or gold? Reply paid. Urgent. Waiting here for answer. From Richard Carton, Nayland Rock Hotel, Margate."

"I will take this myself to the telegraph-office," I said, "and you will wait here for the answer. I will be back as quickly as possible, but it is likely I may be absent for an hour or more."

With that I left him, Devlin accompanying me at my request.

I could have sent the telegram from the railway station, but I chose to send it from the local post-office, for the reason that I expected to receive there a telegram from my wife, whom I had instructed to wire to me, before eight o'clock, whether there was anything fresh in the London newspapers concerning the murder of Lizzie Melladew. I mentioned this to Devlin, and he said,

"You omit nothing; it is a pleasure to work with you. Command me in any way you please. My turn, perhaps, will come by and by."

It was early morning, and our way lay along the Marine Parade, every house in which was either a public or a boarding house. From every basement in the row, as we walked on, ascended one uniform odour of the cooking of bacon and eggs, which caused Devlin to humorously remark that when bacon and eggs ceased to be the breakfast of the average Englishman, the decay of England's greatness would commence. All along the line this familiar odour accompanied us.

At the post-office I found my wife's telegram awaiting me. It was to the effect that there was nothing new in the papers concerning the murder. The criminal was still at large, and the police appeared to have failed in obtaining a clue. I despatched Carton's telegram to the London bank, and then we proceeded to Athelstan Road, and soon found the house we were in search of. I had decided upon my plan of operations: Devlin was not to appear; he was to stand at some distance from the house, and only to come

forward if I called him. I was to knock and inquire for Mr. Dowsett, and explain to him that, not feeling well, I had run down to Margate for the day. Carton had given me his guardian's address, and had asked me to inquire whether Mr. Dowsett would be absent from London for any length of time, intending, if such was the case, to join Mr. Dowsett and his family in the country. Then I was to trust to chance and to anything I observed how next to proceed. The whole invention was as lame as well could be, but I could not think of a better. It was only when decided action was necessary that I felt how powerless I was. All that I had to depend upon was a slender and mysterious thread of conjecture.

I knocked at the door, and of the servant who opened it I inquired if Mr. Dowsett was up yet.

"O, yes, sir," replied the girl. "Up and gone, all of 'em."

"Up and gone, all of them!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. Had breakfast at half-past six, and went away directly afterwards."

"Do you know where to?"

"No, sir. O, here's missus."

The landlady came forward. "Do you want rooms, sir?"

"Not at present. I came to see Mr. Dowsett."

"Gone away, sir; him and the three ladies."

"So your servant informed me; but I thought I should be certain to find him here. Stop. What did you say? Mr. Dowsett and the three ladies? You mean the two ladies?"

"I mean three," said the landlady, looking sharply at me. "They only came on Saturday; Mr. Dowsett came yesterday. You must excuse me, sir; there's the dining-room bell and the drawing-room bell ringing all together."

"A moment, I beg," I said, slipping half-a-crown into her hand. "Do you know where they have gone to?"

"No; they didn't tell me. They were in a hurry to

catch a train ; but I don't know what train, and don't know where to."

Her manner proclaimed that she not only did not know, but did not care.

"They had some boxes with them ?" I said.

"Yes, two. I can't wait another minute. I never did see such a impatient gentleman as the dining-rooms."

"Only one more question," I said, forcibly detaining her. "Did they drive to the station ?"

"Yes ; they had a carriage. Please let me go, sir."

"Do you know the man who drove them ? Do you know the number of the carriage ?"

"Haven't the slightest idea," said the landlady ; and, freeing herself from my grasp, she ran down to her kitchen.

I stepped into the street with a feeling of mortification. Mr. Kenneth Dowsett had given me the slip again. Rejoining Devlin, I related to him what had passed.

"What are you going to do next ?" he asked.

"I am puzzled," I replied, "and hardly know what to do."

"That is not like you," said Devlin. "Come, I will assist you. Mr. Kenneth Dowsett seems to be in a hurry. The more reason for spirit and increased vigilance on our part. Observe, I say *our* part. I am growing interested in this case, and am curious to see the end of it. If Mr. Dowsett has gone back to London, we must follow him there. If he has gone to some other place, we must follow him to some other place."

"But how to find that out ?"

"He was driven to the station in a carriage. We must get hold of the driver. At present we are ignorant whether he has gone by the South-Eastern or the London, Chatham, and Dover. We will go and inquire at the cab-ranks."

But although we spent fully an hour and a half in asking questions of every driver of a carriage we saw, we could ascertain no news of the carriage which had driven Mr. Dowsett and his family from Athelstan Road. I was

in despair, and was about to give up the search and return disconsolately to the Nayland Rock, when a bare-footed boy ran up to me, and asked whether I wasn't looking for "the cove wot drove a party from Athelstan Road."

"Yes, I said excitedly. "Do you know him?"

"O, I knows him," said the boy. "Bill Foster he is. I 'elped him up with the boxes. There was one little box the gent wouldn't let us touch. There was somethink 'eavy in it, and the gent give me a copper. Thank yer, sir."

He was about to scuttle off with the sixpence I gave him, when I seized him, not by the collar, because he had none on, but by the neck where the collar should have been.

"Not so fast. There's half-a-crown more for you if you take me to Bill Foster at once."

"Can't do that, sir; don't know where he is; but I'll find 'im for yer."

"Very good. How many persons went away in Bill Foster's carriage?"

"There was the gent and one—two—three women—two young 'uns and a old 'un."

"You're quite sure?"

"I'll take my oath on it."

"Now look here? Do you see these five shillings? They're yours if you bring Bill Foster to me at the Nayland Rock in less than half-an-hour."

"You ain't kidding, sir?"

"Not at all. The money's yours if you do what I tell you."

"All right, sir? I'll do it."

"And tell Bill Foster there's half-a-sovereign waiting for him at the Nayland Rock; but he mustn't lose a minute."

With an intelligent nod the boy scampered off, and we made our way quickly back to the hotel, where Richard Carton was impatiently waiting us.

"Did you see him?" he asked eagerly.

"No," I replied, "he went away early this morning."

"Where to?"

"I hope to learn that presently. Have you received an answer to your telegram?"

"No, not yet. There's the telegraph messenger."

The lad was mounting the steps of the hotel. We followed him, and obtained the buff-coloured envelope, addressed to "Richard Carton, Nayland Rock Hotel, Margate," which he delivered to a waiter. Carton tore open the envelope, read the message, and handed it to me. The information it contained was that cheque 134,178, for two thousand pounds, signed by Richard Carton, was cashed across the counter on Saturday morning; that the gentleman who presented it demanded that it should be paid in gold; that as this was a large amount to be so paid the cashier had asked the gentleman to sign his name at the back of the cheque, notwithstanding that it was payable to bearer, and that the signature was that of Kenneth Dowsett.

"Do you think there is anything strange in that?" I asked.

"It does seem strange," replied Carton thoughtfully.

I made a rapid mental calculation, and said, "Two thousand sovereigns in gold weigh forty pounds. A heavy weight for a man to carry away with him." Carton did not reply, but I saw that, for the first time, his suspicions were aroused. "You told me," I continued, "that Mrs. Dowsett and her daughter Letitia went away from their house on Saturday morning early."

"So my guardian informed me."

"Was any other lady stopping with them?"

"I did not understand so from my guardian."

"Did they have any particular lady friend whom, for some reason or other, they wished to take with them to the seaside?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"You can think of no one?"

"Indeed, I cannot."

"It is your belief that only two ladies left the house?"

"Yes, it is my belief."

"But," I said, "Mrs. Dowsett took not only her daughter Letitia with her, but another lady, a young lady, as well; and the three, in company with your guardian, left Margate suddenly this morning. I have ascertained this positively. Now, who is this young lady of whom you have no knowledge?" He passed his hand across his forehead, and gazed at me with a dawning terror in his eyes. "Shall I tell you what is in my mind?"

"Yes."

"If," I said, speaking slowly and impressively, "the theory I have formed is correct—and I believe it is—the young lady is Mary Melladew, poor Lizzie's sister."

"Good God!" cried Carton. "What makes you think that?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

WE TRACK MR. KENNETH DOWSETT TO BOULOGNE.

"It would occupy too long a time," I replied, "to make my theory thoroughly comprehensible to you. Besides," I added, glancing at Devlin, "it is a theory strangely born and strangely built up, and, in all likelihood, you would reject the most important parts of it as incredible and impossible. Therefore, we will not waste time in explaining or discussing it. Sufficient for us if we succeed in tracing this dreadful mystery to its roots and in bringing the murderer to justice. If I do not mistake, here comes the man I am waiting for."

It was, indeed, Bill Foster, pioneered by the sharp lad who had engaged to find him.

"Here he is, sir," said the boy, holding out his hand, half-eagerly, half-doubtfully.

"Your name is Foster," I said, addressing the man.

"That's me," said Bill Foster.

"You drove a party from Athelstan Road early this morning?"

"Yes."

I counted five shillings into the boy's outstretched hand, and he scampered away in great delight.

"There's half-a-sovereign for you," I said to Bill Foster, "if you answer correctly a few questions."

"About the party I drove from Athelstan Road?" he asked.

"My questions will refer to them. You seem to hesitate."

"The fact is," said Bill Foster, "the gentleman gave me a florin over my fare to keep my mouth shut."

"Only a fifth of what I offer you," I said.

"Make it a sovereign," suggested Devlin.

"I've no objection," I said.

"All right," said Bill Foster; "fire away."

"The gentleman bribed you to keep silence respecting his movements?" I asked.

"It must have been for that," replied Bill Foster.

"Proving," I observed, "that he must have had some strong reason for secrecy."

"That's got nothing to do with me," remarked Bill Foster.

"Of course not. What you've got to do is to earn the sovereign. Who engaged you for the job?"

"The gentleman himself. I wasn't out with my trap so early, and some one must have told him where I live. Anyways, he comes at a quarter-past six, and knocks me up, and says there's a good job waiting for me at 28 Athelstan Road, if I'd come at once. I says, 'All right,' and I puts my horse to, and drives there. I got to the house at ten minutes to seven, and I drives the party to the London, Chatham, and Dover."

"How many were in the party?"

"Four. The gentleman, a middle-aged lady, and two young 'uns."

"About what ages were the young ladies?"

"Can't quite say. They wore veils; but I should reckon from eighteen to twenty-two. That's near enough."

"What luggage was there?"

"Two trunks, a small box, and some other little things they took care of themselves."

"You had charge of the two trunks?"

"Yes."

"And of the small box?"

"O, no; the gentleman wouldn't let it out of his hands. I offered to help him with it, but he wouldn't let me touch it."

"That surprised you?"

"Well, yes, because it was uncommon heavy. If it was filled with gold he couldn't have been more careful of it."

"Perhaps it was," I said, turning slightly to Richard Carton.

"It was heavy enough. Why, he could hardly carry it."

"Did either of the ladies appear anxious about it?"

"Yes, the middle-aged one. When I saw them so particular, I said, said I—to myself, you know—I shouldn't mind having that myself."

"When the gentleman told you to drive to the London, Chatham, and Dover station, did he say what train he wished to catch?"

"No, but I found out the train they went by. It was the down train for Ramsgate, 7.31."

"They reached the station some time before it started?"

"Yes, twenty minutes before. After the gentleman took his tickets he came from the platform two or three times and looked at me. 'What are you waiting for?' he asked the last time. 'For a fare,' I answered. 'Look here,' he said, 'if anybody asks you any questions about me, don't

answer them. ‘Why shouldn’t I?’ I asked. It was then he pulled out the florin. ‘O, very well,’ I said; ‘it’s no business of mine.’ But I didn’t go away till the train started with them in it.”

“Do you know whether they intended to stop in Margate?”

“I should say not. As I drove ‘em to the station, I heard the gentleman speak to the middle-aged lady—his wife, I suppose—about the boat for Boulogne.”

I gave a start of vexation; Devlin smiled; Carton was following the conversation with great attention.

“Do you know what boat?”

“The Sir Walter Raleigh. The gentleman had one of the bills in his hand, and was looking at it. He said to the lady, ‘We shall be in plenty of time.’”

“Do you know at what time the boat starts from Ramsgate for Boulogne?”

“Leaves the harbour at half-past nine, but is generally half an hour late.”

I looked at my watch. It was just eleven o’clock.

“Is there any chance,” I asked, “of this boat being delayed?”

“Why should it? The weather’s fair.”

“Is there any other boat starting for Boulogne this morning?”

“None. There’s the Sir Walter Raleigh from Ramsgate, and sometimes the India from here; but the India don’t go to-day.”

“Could we hire a boat from here?”

“You might, but it would be risky, and would cost a lot of money. Then, there’s no saying when you would get there. It’s a matter of between forty and fifty miles, and the steamers take about five hours getting across; sometimes a little less, generally a little more. There’s no depending upon ‘em. Look here. You’re going to behave to me liberal. You want to follow the party I drove from Athelstan Road this morning.”

'Show me the way to get to Boulogne to-day,' I said, 'and I'll give you another half-sovereign.'

"Practical creature!" murmured Devlin. "In human dealings there is but one true touchstone."

"Spoke like a real gentleman," said Bill Foster to me. "What time is it?"

"Five minutes past eleven."

"Wait here; I sha'n't be gone but a few minutes. Get everything ready to start directly I come back."

His trap was standing at the corner of Royal Crescent. He ran out, jumped on the box, and was gone. I called to the waiter, and in three minutes the hotel bill was paid, and we were ready.

During Bill Foster's absence I said to Carton,

"Do you make anything of all this?"

"It looks," replied Carton, "as if my guardian was running away."

"To my mind there's not a doubt of it. Have you any idea what that little box he would not let out of his charge contains?"

"The two thousand sovereigns he obtained from the bank," said Carton, in a tone of inquiry.

"Exactly. I tell you now plainly that I am positive Mr. Kenneth Dowsett is implicated in the murder of your poor girl."

Carton set his teeth in great agitation. "If he is! if he is!" he said; but he could say no more.

Bill Foster was back.

"There's a train to Folkestone," he cried, "the South-Eastern line, at 11.47. You can catch it easily. If there's no boat handy from Folkestone to Boulogne, you'll be able to hire one there. The steamers take two hours going across. You can get there in four. Train arrives at Folkestone at 1.27. By six o'clock you can be in Boulogne. Jump into my trap, gentlemen."

We jumped in, and were driven to the station. His information was correct. I gave him thirty shillings, and

he departed in high glee. Then we took tickets for Folkestone, and arrived there at a quarter to two.

There was no steamer going, but with little difficulty we arranged to get across. The passage took longer than four hours—it took six. At nine o'clock at night we were in Boulogne.

I cannot speak an intelligible sentence in French. Carton was too agitated to take the direction of affairs.

"Do you know where we can stop?" I asked of Devlin.
"Have you ever been here before?"

"My dear sir," said Devlin, "I have travelled all over the world, and I know Boulogne by heart. There's a little out-of-the-way hotel, the *Hôtel de Poilly*, in Rue de l'Amiral Bruix, that will suit us as though it were built for us."

"Let us get there at once," I said.

He called a fly, and in a very short time we entered the courtyard of the *Hôtel de Poilly*. There we made arrangements with the jolly, comfortable-looking landlady, and then I looked at Carton, and he looked at me. The helplessness of our situation struck us both forcibly.

"Who is in command?" asked Devlin suddenly.

"You," I replied, as by an inspiration.

"Good," said Devlin. "I accept the office. From this moment you are under my orders. Remain you here; I go to reconnoitre."

"You will return?" I said.

"My dear sir," said Devlin airily, "it is too late now to doubt my integrity. I will return."

"For God's sake," said Carton, when Devlin was gone, "who is this man who seems to divine everything, to know everything, and whom nothing disturbs? Sometimes when he looks at me I feel that he is exercising over me a terrible fascination."

"I cannot answer you," I said. "Be satisfied with the knowledge that it is through him we have so far succeeded, and that, in my belief, it will be through him that

the murderer will be tracked down. The world is full of mysteries, and that man is not the least of them."

It wanted an hour to midnight when Devlin returned. In his inscrutable face I read no sign of success or failure; but the first words he spoke afforded me infinite relief.

"I have seen him," he said. "Let us go out and talk. Walls have ears."

The river Liane was but a short distance from the hotel, and we strolled along the bank in silence, Devlin, contrary to my expectation, not uttering a word for many minutes. He had lit a cigar, and Carton had accepted one from him; I refused to smoke, having too vivid a remembrance of the cigar I had smoked in Fanny Lemon's house, and its effect upon me. At length Devlin said to Carton:

"You appear sleepy."

"I am," said the young man.

"You had best go to bed," said Devlin; "nothing can be done to-night."

Carton, assenting, would have returned to the hotel alone, saying he could find the way, but I insisted that we should accompany him thither. I had heard that Boulogne was not the safest place in the world for strangers on a dark night. Having seen Carton to his room, we returned to the river's bank. Had Carton been in possession of his full senses he would doubtless have objected, but he was dead asleep when he entered his bedroom, Devlin's cigar having affected him as the one I smoked had affected me.

"He encumbers us," said Devlin, looking out upon the dark river. "I have discovered where Mr. Dowsett is lodging, and were our young friend informed of the address he might rush there, and spoil all. We happen to be in luck, if you believe in such a quality as luck. I do not; but I use the term out of compliment to you. Mr. Dowsett's quarters are in the locality of the Rue de la Paix, and, singularly enough, are situated over a barber's shop. Things

go in runs, do they not ? Nothing but barbers. I do not return with you to the hotel to-night."

" What do you mean ?" I asked, startled by this information.

" The proprietor of the barber's shop over which Mr. Kenneth Dowsett is sleeping—but, perhaps, not sleeping, for a sword is hanging above his head, and he may be gazing at the phantom in terror—say, then, over which he is lying, is an agreeable person. I have struck up an acquaintance with him, and, by arrangement, shall be in his saloon to-morrow, to attend to any persons who may present themselves. Mr. Dowsett will probably need the razor and the brush. I can easily account for my appearance in Boulogne ; I have come to see my friend and brother. Mr. Dowsett, unsuspecting—for what connection can he trace between me and Lizzie Melladew ?—will place himself in my hands. He has told me that there is not my equal ; he may find that it is so. In order that I may not miss him I go to the house to-night. Early in the morning come you, alone, to the Rue de la Paix. You can ride to the foot of the hill, there alight, and on the right-hand side, a third of the way up, you will see my new friend's establishment. I will find you a snug corner from which you may observe and hear, yourself unseen, all that passes. Are you satisfied now that I am keeping faith with you ?"

" Indeed, you are proving it," I replied.

" Give me no more credit than I deserve," said Devlin. " It is simply that I keep a promise. In the fulfilment of this promise—both in the spirit and to the letter, my dear sir—I may to-morrow unfold to you a wonder. It is my purpose to compel the man we have pursued to himself reveal all that he knows of Lizzie Melladew. Perhaps it will be as well for you to take down in writing what passes between us. Accept it from me that there are unseen forces and unseen powers in this world, so rich in sin, of which few men dream. See those shadows moving on the water—are they not like living spirits ? The dark

river itself, had it a tongue, could appal you. On such nights as this are secret crimes committed by devils who bear the shape of men. What kind of being is that who smiles in your face, who presses your hand, who speaks pleasant words to you, and harbours all the while in what is called his heart a fell design towards the execution of which he moves without one spark of compassion ? I don't complain of him, my dear sir ; on the contrary"—and here, although I could not see Devlin's face, I could fancy a sinister smile overspreading it—"I rather delight in him. It proves him to be what he is—and he is but a type of innumerable others. Your innocent ones are arrogant in the vaunting of their goodness ; your ambitious ones glory in their successes which bring ruin to their brethren ; your kings and emperors appropriate Providence, and do not even pay him a shilling for the conscription. A grand world, and grandly peopled ! The man who glories in sin compels my admiration ; but this one whom we are hunting is a coward and a sneak. He shall meet his doom !"

As he ceased speaking he vanished ; I can find no other word to express the effect his sudden disappearance had upon me. Whether he intended to create a dramatic surprise I cannot say, but, certainly, he was no longer by my side. With some difficulty I found my way alone back to the Hôtel de Poilly, where Carton was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TRANCE AND THE REVELATION.

Of all the strange experiences I have narrated in connection with Devlin, that which awaited me on the following morning was the most startling and inexplicable. Prevailing with difficulty upon Richard Carton to remain

at the hotel until I either came to or sent for him, I drove to the foot of the Rue de la Paix, as I was instructed to do. I took the precaution to hire the driver of the fly by the hour, and desired him to stop where I alighted until I needed him. I was impelled to this course by a feeling that I might possibly require some person to take a message to Carton or bring him to the Rue de la Paix. I found the barber's shop easily, and could scarcely refrain from uttering a loud exclamation at the sight of Mr. Kenneth Dowsett sitting in a barber's chair, and Devlin standing over him, leisurely at work. Devlin, with his finger at his lips, pointed to a table in a corner of the shop, at which I seated myself in obedience to the silent command. On the table were writing materials and paper, and on a sheet of this paper was written : " You are late. I have thrown Mr. Dowsett into a trance. He will reveal all he knows. I will compel him to do so. Take down in writing what transpires."

My heart throbbed violently as I prepared myself for the task.

Devlin : " Do you know where you are ? "

Mr. Dowsett : " Yes, in Boulogne."

Devlin : " Where were you yesterday ? "

Mr. Dowsett : " In Margate."

Devlin : " Where were you on Friday last ? "

Mr. Dowsett : " At home, in London."

Devlin : " Recall the occurrences of that day ? "

Mr. Dowsett : " I do so."

Devlin : " At what hour did you rise ? "

Mr. Dowsett : " At nine o'clock."

Devlin : " Who were present at the breakfast-table ? "

Mr. Dowsett : " My wife and daughter, and Richard Carton."

Devlin : " Was anything relating to the engagement of Richard Carton and Lizzie Melladew said at the breakfast-table ? "

Mr. Dowsett : " Nothing."

Devlin : "Was there anything in your mind in relation to it?"

Mr. Dowsett : "Yes. I had a plan to carry out, and was thinking of it."

Devlin : "In what way did you put the plan into execution?"

Mr. Dowsett : "When breakfast was over, I went to my private room and locked the door. Then I sat down and wrote a letter."

Devlin : "To whom?"

Mr. Dowsett : "To Lizzie Melladew."

Devlin : "What did you write?"

Mr. Dowsett : "A heart-broken woman implores you to meet her to-night at eleven o'clock in Victoria Park, and, so that she may recognise you, begs you to wear a bunch of white daisies in your belt. She will wear the same, so that you may recognise her. The life and welfare of Mr. Richard Carton hangs upon this meeting. If you fail, a dreadful fate awaits him, which you can avert. As you value his happiness and your own, come."

Devlin : "What did you do with the letter?"

Mr. Dowsett : "I addressed it to Miss Lizzie Melladew, at her place of business in Baker Street, and posted it at the Charing Cross Post-office."

Devlin : "How did you know she worked there?"

Mr. Dowsett : "I learnt it from my ward, Richard Carton."

Devlin : "Did you disguise your handwriting?"

Mr. Dowsett : "Yes; I wrote it in a feminine hand."

Devlin : "What was your object in writing the letter?"

Mr. Dowsett : "I was determined that Richard Carton should not marry Lizzie Melladew."

Devlin : "Why?"

Mr. Dowsett : "I had all along arranged that he should marry my daughter Letitia."

Devlin : "How did you propose to break off the match between your ward and Lizzie Melladew?"

Mr. Dowsett : " My plans were not entirely clear to myself. I intended to appeal to the young woman, and to invent some disreputable story to make her suspect that he was false to her. If that failed, then——"

Devlin : " Proceed. Then ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " I was resolved to go any lengths, to do anything to prevent the marriage."

Devlin : " Even murder."

Mr. Dowsett : " I did not think of that—I would not think of it."

Devlin : " But you did think of it. You could not banish that idea from your mind ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " I could not, though I tried. It crept in the whole of the day. I could not help seeing the scene. Night—the park—the young woman with the bunch of white daisies in her belt stained with blood."

Devlin : " Those pictures were in your mind, and you could not banish them ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " I could not."

Devlin : " There were other reasons for preventing the marriage than your wish that Richard Carton should marry your daughter ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " There were."

Devlin : " What were they ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " If he married Lizzie Melladew, I should no longer enjoy the income I had received for so many years. I looked upon it as mine. I could not live without it. We should have been beggared—disgraced as well. I had forged my ward's name to bills, and if he married out of my family there would have been exposure, and I might have found myself in a felon's dock. If he married my daughter this would not occur. I was safe so long as I could keep my hold upon him."

Devlin : " Did your wife and daughter know this ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " My daughter knew nothing of it. My wife suspected it."

Devlin : " Did she know that you contemplated murder ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " She did not."

Devlin : " Why did you give Richard Carton a sleeping draught on that night ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " In order that he might sleep soundly, and not discover that I left the house late."

Devlin : " Were your wife and daughter asleep when you left your house ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " They were abed. I do not know whether they were asleep."

Devlin : " You took a knife with you ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " I did."

Devlin : " Where did you obtain it ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " It was a large clasp knife I had had for years. I found it in a private drawer."

Devlin : " You went to the private drawer for the purpose of finding it ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " I did."

Devlin : " Did any one see you leave the house ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " No one."

Devlin : " Did you walk or ride to Victoria Park ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " I walked."

Devlin : " To avoid suspicion ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " Yes."

Devlin : " When you arrived at the Park did you have any difficulty in finding Miss Melladew ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " I soon found her."

Devlin : " What did you do then ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " I made an appeal to her."

Devlin : " Did she listen to you quietly ?"

Mr. Dowsett : " No. She taunted me with having tricked her by writing an anonymous letter in a disguised hand."

Devlin : " Go on."

Mr. Dowsett : " I told her it was the only way I could obtain a private interview with her. I invented a scandalous story about my ward. She said she did not believe it, and that she would expose me to him. She told me that I was

infamous, and that it was her belief I had been systematically practising deceit upon my ward, and that she would not be surprised to discover that I had been robbing him. ‘To-morrow he shall see you in your true colours,’ she said. I was maddened. If she carried out her intention I knew that I was a ruined and disgraced man. ‘That to-morrow will never come!’ I cried. The knife was in my hand. I scarcely know how it came there, and do not remember opening the blade. ‘That to-morrow will come!’ she retorted. ‘It shall not!’ I cried; and I stabbed her to the heart. She uttered but one cry, and fell down dead.”

Devlin: “What did you do after that?”

Mr. Dowsett: “I hastened away, taking the knife with me. I chose the darkest paths. Suddenly I came upon a young woman sitting upon a bench, reclining against the back. I saw her face, and was rooted to the spot in sudden fear. She did not stir. Recovering, I crept softly towards her, and found that she was asleep. Leaving her there, I hastened back to the woman I had stabbed. I knelt down and looked closely at her. I felt in her pockets; she was quite dead. There were letters in her pockets which I examined, and then—and then——”

Devlin: “And then?”

Mr. Dowsett: “I discovered that the woman I had killed was not Lizzie Melladew!”

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RESCUE.

So startled was I by this revelation that I jumped to my feet in a state of uncontrollable agitation. What I should have done I cannot say, but the direction of events was not left in my hands. Simultaneously with my movement of astonishment, a piercing scream rang through the house.

I was standing now by the chair in which Mr. Kenneth Dowsett was sitting in his trance, and I observed a change pass over his face ; the scream had pierced the veil in which his waking senses were enshrouded. Devlin also observed this change, and he said to me hurriedly :

" Go up-stairs and see what is taking place. Your presence may be needed there, and to one person may be very welcome. I will keep charge over this man."

As I left the room I heard Devlin turn the key in the lock. Rapidly I mounted the stairs, and dashed into a room on the first landing, from which the sound of female voices were issuing. Three women were there ; two were strangers to me, but even in that agitating moment I correctly divined that they were Mrs. Dowsett and Letitia ; the third, who rushed with convulsive sobs into my open arms, was no other than Lizzie Melladew herself.

" O, thank God, you have come !" she sobbed ; " thank God ! thank God ! Where is Mary ? Where is Richard ? Take me to them ! O, take me to them ! "

Mrs. Dowsett was the first to recover herself. " You will remain here," she said sternly to Lizzie ; and then, addressing me, " How dare you break into my apartment in this manner ? "

" I dare do more than that," I replied, in a voice sterner than her own, and holding the weeping girl close to my heart. " Prepare you to answer for what has been done. I thank God, indeed, that I have arrived in time, perhaps, to prevent another crime. All is discovered."

At these words Mrs. Dowsett shrank back, white and trembling. I did not stop to say more. My first duty was to place Lizzie Melladew in safety ; but where ? The mental question conveyed its own answer. Where, but in her lover's arms ?

" Come," I said to Lizzie. " You are safe now. I am going to take you to Richard Carton. Trust yourself to me."

" I will, I will !" sobbed Lizzie. " Richard is here,

then? How thankful I am, how thankful! And Mary, my dear sister, is she here, too?"

I was appalled at this last question. It proved that Lizzie was ignorant of what had occurred. Not daring to answer her, I drew her from the room, and the women I left there made no attempt to prevent me. Swiftly I took my precious charge from the house, and in a very few minutes we were in the carriage which was waiting for me at the foot of the Rue de la Paix. The driver understood the direction I gave him, and we galloped at full speed to the Hôtel de Poilly. Without revealing to Lizzie what I knew, I learnt from her before we reached the hotel sufficient to enlighten me as to Mr. Kenneth Dowsett's proceedings, and to confirm my suspicion that it was Mary Melladew who had met her death at that villain's hands. When Lizzie received the anonymous letter which he wrote to her, she took it to her poor sister, who, fearing some plot, prevailed upon her to let her see the anonymous writer in Lizzie's place; and, the better to carry out the plan, the sisters changed dresses, and went together to Victoria Park. Being twins, and bearing so close a resemblance to each other, there was little fear of the change being discovered until at least Mary had ascertained why the meeting was so urgently desired. Leaving Lizzie in a secluded part of the park, Mary proceeded to the rendezvous, with what result Mr. Dowsett's confession has already made clear. Discovering the fatal error he had committed, Mr. Dowsett returned to Lizzie, who, while waiting for her sister, had fallen asleep. Being thoroughly unnerved, he decided that there was only one means of safety before him—flight and the concealment of Lizzie Melladew. The idea of a second murder may have occurred to him, but, villain as he was, he had not the courage to carry it out. He had taken from the dead girl's pocket everything it contained, with the exception of a handkerchief which, in his haste, he overlooked; and upon this handkerchief was marked the name of Lizzie Melladew. He could imitate Richard Carton's writing—as was

proved by the forgeries he had already committed—and upon the back of this anonymous letter he wrote in pencil a few words in which Lizzie was implored to trust herself implicitly to Mr. Dowsett, and without question to do as he directed. Signing these words in Richard Carton's name, he awoke Lizzie and gave her the note. Alarmed and agitated as the young girl was, and fearing that some great danger threatened her lover, she, with very little hesitation, allowed herself to be persuaded by Mr. Dowsett, and accompanied him home. "Where is Mary?" she asked. "With our dear Richard," replied Mr. Dowsett; "we shall see them to-morrow, when all will be explained." At home Mr. Dowsett informed his wife of his peril, and the three females left for Margate by an early train in the morning. In Margate Mrs. Dowsett received telegrams signed "Richard Carton," but really sent by her husband, which she showed to Lizzie, and which served in some measure to assist the successful continuation of the scheme by which Lizzie was to be taken out of the country. Meanwhile she was in absolute ignorance of her sister's fate; no newspaper was allowed to reach her hands, nor was she allowed to speak to a soul but Mrs. Dowsett and Letitia. What was eventually to be done with her I cannot say; probably Mr. Dowsett himself had not been able to make up his mind, which was almost entirely occupied by considerations for his own safety.

I did not, of course, learn all this from Lizzie, she being then ignorant of much which I have related, but I have put together what she told me and what I subsequently learnt from Devlin and other sources.

Arriving at the Hôtel de Poilly, I succeeded in conveying Lizzie into a private room, and then I sought Richard Carton. I need not set down here in detail the conversation I had with him. Little by little I made him acquainted with the whole truth. Needless to describe his joy when he heard that his beloved girl was alive and safe—joy, tempered with grief at poor Mary's fate.

When he was calm enough to be practical, he asked me what was to be done.

"No time must be lost," I said, "in restoring your dear Lizzie to her parents. To you I shall confide her. Leave that monster, your treacherous guardian, to Devlin and me."

It was with difficulty I restrained him from rushing to Lizzie, but I insisted that his movements must be definitely decided upon before he saw her. I called in the assistance of the jolly landlady, and she supplied me with a time-table, from which I ascertained that a boat for Dover left at 12.31, and that it was timed to reach its destination at 3.20. There were numerous trains from Dover to London, and Lizzie would be in her parents' arms before night. Carton joyfully acquiesced in this arrangement, and then I took him in to his dear girl, and, closing the door upon them, left them to themselves. A meeting such as theirs, and under such circumstances, was sacred.

While they were together I wrote two letters—one to my wife, and the other to Mr. Portland—which I intended should be delivered by Carton. I did not intrude upon the happy lovers till the last moment. I found them sitting close together, quite silent, hand clasped in hand, her head upon his breast. I had cautioned him to say nothing of Mary's sad fate, and I saw by the expression upon Lizzie's face that he had obeyed me. After joy would come sorrow; there was time enough for that. Mary had given her life for her sister's; the sacrifice would ever be held in sacred remembrance.

I saw them off by the boat; they waved their handkerchiefs to me, and I thought of the Melladews mourning at home, to whom, at least, one dear child would soon be restored. When the boat was out of sight, I jumped into the carriage, and was driven back to the Rue de la Paix.

CHAPTER XXX.

DEVLIN'S LAST SCHEME.

I TRIED the door of the room in which I had left Devlin and Mr. Kenneth Dowsett. It was locked.

"Enter," said Devlin, unlocking the door.

They were both in the room, Devlin smiling and unruffled, Mr. Dowsett in the full possession of his senses, and terribly ill at ease.

He turned like death when he saw me.

"This gentleman," said Devlin, "is angry at being detained by me, and would have resorted to violence if he thought it would serve his purpose. I have waited for your return to decide what to do."

"You shall pay for this," Mr. Dowsett managed to say, "you and your confederate. If there is justice in this world, I will make you smart for your unlawful proceedings."

"There *is* justice in the world," I said calmly, "as you shall find."

He was silent. With a weight of guilt upon his soul, he did not know how to reply to this remark. But he managed presently to ask :

"How long do you intend to detain me?"

"You shall know soon," I said ; and, by a gesture, I intimated to Devlin that I wished to confer with him alone.

He accompanied me from the room, and we stood in the passage, keeping guard upon the door, which Devlin locked from the outside.

"There are no means of escape from within," he said.
"I have seen to that."

In a low tone I told him what I had done, and he approved.

"The question now is," I said, "what step are we next to take?"

"There lies the difficulty," replied Devlin. "You see

my dear sir, we have no evidence upon which to arrest him."

"No evidence!" I cried. "Is there not his own confession of guilt?"

Devlin shook his head. "Spiritual evidence only, my dear sir. Not admissible in any court of law in the world. Impossible to obtain his arrest in a foreign country upon such a slender thread. He might bring the same accusation against us, and we might all be thrown into gaol, and kept there for months. That is not what I bargained for. Our best plan will be to get him back to England; then you can take some practicable step."

"But how to manage that?" I asked.

"It can be managed, I think," said Devlin. "I have a scheme. He knows nothing of the confession he has made. Lizzie Melladew's name has not been mentioned between us. It is only his fears and my strength of will that make him tractable. Before I put my scheme into operation, go up-stairs to see if his wife and daughter are in the house. I have my suspicions that they have flown. You will find me here when you come down."

I ran up-stairs to the apartments occupied by Mrs. Dowsett. Devlin's suspicions were confirmed. The two women were gone. There were evidences around of a hasty flight, the most pregnant of them being a small box which had been broken open. I judged immediately that this was the box which had contained the two thousand sovereigns; and, indeed, I found two of the sovereigns under a couch, whither they had rolled while the bulk was being taken out. The conclusion I came to was, that the women, frightened that all was discovered, as I had informed them, had broken open the box, and, packing the gold away upon their persons, had taken to flight, leaving Mr. Dowsett to his fate.

I went down to Devlin, and acquainted him with the result of my investigation.

"Quite as I expected," he said. "Let them go for the present. Our concern is with the man inside. I am

going to put my scheme into operation. What is the time?"

"Five minutes past two," I replied, looking at my watch.

"In capital time," said Devlin. "Wait you here until half-past two. Then go in to Mr. Dowsett, and apologise to him for the indignity to which he has been subjected. He will fume and threaten; let him. Be you humble and contrite, and say that you are very, very sorry. Throw all the blame upon me: say that I have deceived you, imposed upon you, robbed you—anything that comes to your mind. To me it matters not; it will assist our scheme. There is no fear of Mr. Dowsett not waiting till you go in to him; he is frightened out of his life. Your humble attitude will give him courage; he will think himself safe."

"I cannot imagine," I said, "how this will help us."

"Don't imagine," said Devlin curtly. "Leave all to me. The first thing Mr. Dowsett will do when he finds himself free will be to go up to the rooms in which he left the three women who accompanied him here. Meanwhile, you will keep watch outside the house; but on no account must he see you. Trust to me for the rest."

He had served me so faithfully up to this point that I trusted him unhesitatingly. As he had prophesied, Mr. Dowsett kept quiet within the room. Listening at the door, I heard him moving softly about, but he made no attempt to come out. At half-past two I entered the room, and followed Devlin's instructions to the letter. Mr. Dowsett, his courage restored, immediately began to bluster and threaten. I listened submissively, and made pretence of being greatly distressed. When he had exhausted himself, I left him with further profuse expressions of regret, and as I issued from the house I saw him mounting the stairs to his wife's apartments.

Emerging into the Rue de la Paix, I planted myself in a spot from which I had a clear view of the house, and was

myself concealed from observation. Scarcely was I settled in my position when I saw a man, with a telegram in his hand, enter the house. He remained there a very few moments, and then came out and walked away, having, presumably, delivered his message. Within a space of five minutes, Mr. Dowsett, holding the telegram, came forth, and, casting sharp glances around, quickly left the Rue de la Paix. Before he had turned the corner, Devlin joined me, humming a French song. Together we followed Mr. Dowsett at a safe distance.

"My scheme is alive," he said.

I asked him to explain it to me.

"You saw the messenger," he said, "enter with a telegram. You saw him leave without it. You saw Mr. Dowsett come out with the telegram. It was from his wife."

"From his wife?"

"Sent by me. The telegram was to the effect that something had occurred which had induced her to leave Boulogne immediately, and that she, her daughter, and the young lady with them (I was careful not to mention her name, you see) would be in Ramsgate, waiting for him. He was to come by the afternoon boat, and she would meet him on the pier. See, he is entering the shipping-office now, to secure his passage."

"What are we to do?"

"We travel in the same boat, going aboard at the last moment. After the boat has started—not before—he will know that we are fellow-passengers."

All happened as Devlin had arranged. By his skilful pioneering we did not lose sight of Mr. Dowsett until he stepped aboard the boat, and I inferred from his manner that by that time he had regained confidence, and deemed his secret safe. When we slipped on deck, at the very moment of starting, Mr. Dowsett was below in the saloon.

There were not many passengers, and the French coast was still in view when Mr. Dowsett came up from the saloon and stood by the bulwarks, within a yard or two of the seat

upon which we were sitting. We did not speak, but sat watching him. Turning, he saw us.

"You here!" he cried.

"By your leave," I replied.

"Not by my leave," he said. "Why are you following me?"

"Have you any reason," I said, "for suspecting that you are being followed?"

"I was a fool to ask the question," he said, turning abruptly away.

I did not speak, but kept my eyes upon him. I was determined not to lose sight of him for another moment. Some understanding of this determination seemed to dawn upon him; he looked at me two or three times with wavering eyes, and presently, summoning all his courage to his aid, he stared me full in the face. I met his gaze sternly, unflinchingly, until I compelled him to lower his eyes. Then he suddenly went down into the saloon. I stepped swiftly after him, and Devlin accompanied me. For the purpose of testing me, he turned and ascended again to the deck. We followed him.

"Perhaps," he said, "you will explain what you mean by this conduct?"

"What need to ask?" I replied. "Let your conscience answer."

"It is an outrage," he said, after a pause. "If you continue to annoy me, I shall appeal to the captain."

"Do so," I said, "and prepare to meet at once the charge I shall bring against you."

He did not dare to inquire the nature of the charge. He did not dare to move or speak again. Sullenly, and with an inward raging, the traces of which he could not disguise, he remained by the bulwarks, staring down at the water.

Suddenly there was a lull aboard. The machinery stopped working.

"Some accident," said Devlin, and went to ascertain

its nature. Returning, he said, "We shall be delayed a couple of hours, most likely. It will be dark night, when we arrive."

It was as he said. For two hours or more we made no progress; then, the necessary repairs having been made, we started again. By that time it was evening. And still Mr. Dowsett neither moved or spoke.

Night crept on; there was no moon, and not a star visible in the dark sky; it was black night. Mr. Dowsett strove to take advantage of this to evade and escape from us, but we kept so close to him that we could have touched him by the movement of a finger; where he glided, we glided; and still he uttered not a word.

We stood in a group alone, isolated as it were, from the other passengers. After repeated attempts to slip from us, Mr. Dowsett remained still again. In the midst of the darkness Devlin's voice stole upon our ears.

"Short-sighted fool," he said, "to think that crime can be for ever successfully hidden. Wherever man moves, the spirit of committed evil accompanies him, and leads him to his doom. His peril lies not only in mortal insight, but in the unseen, mysterious agencies, by which he is surrounded. Blood for blood; it is the immutable law; and if by some human failure he for a time evades his punishment at the hand of man, he suffers a punishment more terrible than human justice can execute upon him. Waking or sleeping, it is ever with him. Look out upon the darkness, and behold, rising from the shadows, the form of the innocent girl whose life you took. To the last moment of your life her spirit shall accompany you; till death claims you, you shall know no peace!"

Whatever of malignancy there was in Devlin's voice, the words he spoke conveyed the stern, eternal truth. It seemed to me, as I gazed before me, that the spirit he evoked loomed sadly among the shadows.

Onward through the sea the boat ploughed its way, and we three stood close together, encompassed by a dread and

awful silence ; for Devlin spoke no more, nor from Mr. Dowsett's lips did any sound issue.

In the distance we saw the lights of Ramsgate Pier, and before the captain or any person on board was aware of its close contiguity, we suddenly dashed against it.

I and all others on board were thrown violently down by the shock. There were loud cries of alarm and agony, and I found myself separated from my companions. From the water came appeals for help from some who had been tossed overboard by the collision, and a period of great confusion ensued. What help could be given was afforded, and when I succeeded in reaching the stone pier in safety, I heard that a few of the passengers were missing—among them Devlin and Mr. Dowsett.

I remained on the pier till past one o'clock in the morning, rendering what little assistance I could ; and eventually I learnt that all who had been in danger were saved, with the exception of the two whom I have named. It was early morning before the body of one was recovered. That one was Mr. Kenneth Dowsett. He lay dead in a boat, his face convulsed with agony, upturned to the gray light of the coming day. Of Devlin no trace could be found.

* * * * *

There is but little more to tell. With the exception of the part which Devlin played in it, and which has now for the first time been related, the story became public property, and Kenneth Dowsett was proved to be the murderer of poor Mary Melladew. Time has softened the grief of Mr. and Mrs. Melladew, and they find in the love of Lizzie and her husband, Richard Carton, some solace for the tragedy which a ruthless hand committed. Mr. Portland paid me the two thousand pounds he promised, and I am in a fair way of business. Fanny Lemon and her husband live in retirement in the country. Not a word ever passes their lips in connection with the events I have related. I have seen and heard nothing of Mrs. Dowsett and her daughter.

* * * * *

A short time ago my wife and I were in an open-air public place of amusement witnessing a wonderful exhibition, the extraordinary novelty of which consisted in a man floating earthwards from the clouds at a distance of some thousands of feet from the earth.

"Look there!" said my wife.

I had given her such faithful and vivid descriptions of Devlin that she always said, if it happened that he still lived and she saw him, that she could not fail to recognise him. I turned in the direction she indicated, and, standing alone, apart from the crowd, once more saw Devlin. He was watching the performer floating from heaven to earth. There was a strange smile upon his lips.

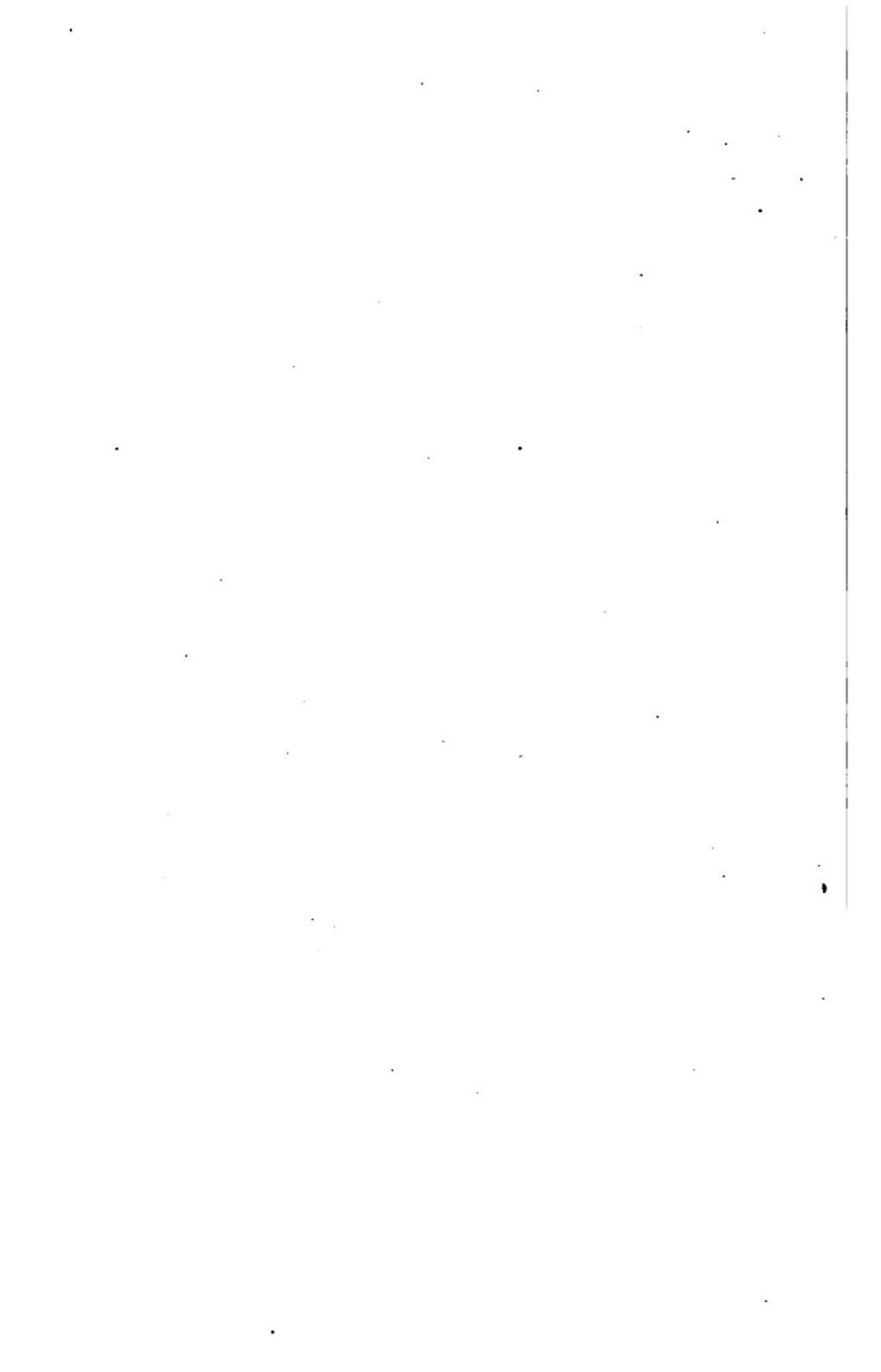
I could not restrain the impulse which prompted me to move towards him. My approach attracted his attention. He looked at me, and was gone. I have never seen him since.

The last words I heard him speak recur to me. There was in them the spirit of Divine justice. Crimes cannot be for ever successfully hidden. The monsters who commit them shall be brought to their doom by those whose duty it is to track them down, or by unseen mysterious agencies by which they are surrounded, or by their own confession.

But let the legislators see to it; let those who call themselves philanthropists and humanitarians see to it; let those whose fortune it is to possess great wealth see to it. There are in this modern Babylon fester-spots of corruption wherein nothing but sin and vice can possibly grow. They are crowded with human beings ripening for evil; they are crowded with human souls lost to salvation. They are an infamy—and the infamy rests not upon the creatures who are born and bred there, but upon those who allow them to be, and who have the undoubted power to cleanse them, and make them healthy for body and soul. For generation upon generation have they been allowed to breed corruption; to this day they are allowed to do so. All who have the

remedy in their hands are responsible. The preacher who preaches and does not practise; the rich who can afford, but grudges to give; the statesman with his dilettante efforts towards social improvement, and his huge efforts towards place and power—one and all of these are accountable for the sin. It is no less, and it rests upon them.

THE END.





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